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PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 53 (Holiday 2011)

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REVIEWED

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY
Saints Row: The Third
Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One
LOTR: War in the North

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HOLIDAY 2011

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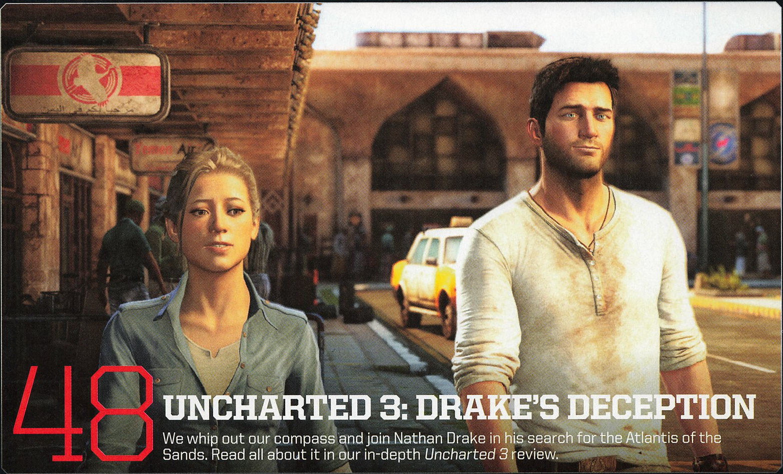

48 UNCHARTED 3: DRAKE'S DECEPTION
We whip out our compass and join Nathan Drake in his search for the Atlantis of the Sands. Read all about it in our in-depth *Uncharted 3* review.

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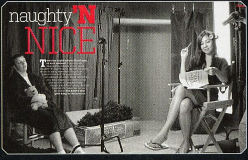
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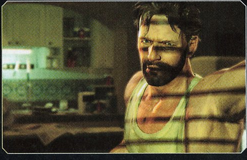

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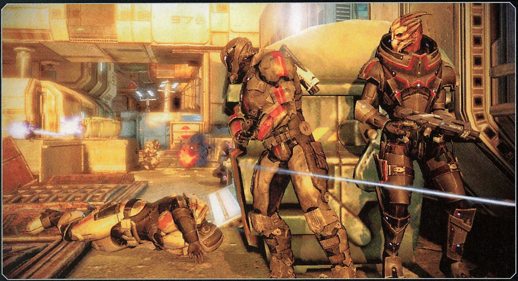

34 **MASS EFFECT 3**
Commander Shepard is called upon again, but this time it isn't the fate of the universe at stake, it's his own online multiplayer rep. Time to assemble a team and get shootin'.

Triple Play

'Tis the season for great games

Take a peek at this issue's reviews. Yep, those aren't typos. Three games—*Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*, *Batman: Arkham City*, and *Saints Row: The Third*—managed to earn a score of "10." Honestly, I can't ever remember there being another issue when we've had three games earn our highest rating.

The fact that *Uncharted 3* and *Batman* lived up to high expectations comes as no surprise; both titles' predecessors were amazing achievements and we were blown away every time we had an opportunity to sample them over the past months. But full credit to Naughty Dog and Rocksteady Studios for not only matching, but exceeding their established greatness—any elite sport team will tell you that repeating a championship is the hardest task.

But there's a special delight in how *Saints Row* fared. The franchise has always been entertaining, but it's flown a bit under the radar, never quite receiving its due—that all changed a few months ago when Volition dropped by for an in-depth demo of their new game. I laughed so hard during that session that my handwritten notes were illegible. Of course, *Saints Row* deserves its Mature ESRB rating and the humor isn't for everyone (it's sure to offend many), but there is something supremely engaging and brilliant about its outrageousness. I've played *Uncharted*, and plan a visit to Gotham, but *Saints Row* may very well be the game I live and breathe for the next few months.

The amazing thing is, as I wrap up this issue and look ahead to the next, I see the likes of *Assassin's Creed: Revelations, Battlefield 3, Modern Warfare 3,* and *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* listed for review. Could we be on the verge of back-to-back triple plays?! One thing's for sure, I'm going to enjoy every moment of this wondrous gaming season.

Roger Burchill
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Years ago, Ken Bousquet discovered the Fountain of Youth. Afraid of the possibilities he destroyed it, but not before he took a little dip. We have no idea how old he actually is.

Scott Butterworth
Associate Editor
twitter.com/ScottPTOM

When Scott Butterworth swore he would never break another controller out of rage, we had no idea what the ramifications of his pent-up anger might be.

Ryan Taljonick
Assistant Editor
twitter.com/RyanTaljonick

Ryan Taljonick was always told he would never be able to fly. Well he proved everyone wrong when he jumped off the office roof and flew straight into the ground below.

Anne Lewis
Editorial Intern
twitter.com/BDRAnneLewis

Sadly Anne Lewis was severly injured in a tragic accident involving Scott and an Ethernet cable. See? We were going somewhere with that neat little Scott/Controller story.

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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).

FUTURE PLC
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REPRINTS: Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com.

PLAYSTATION: THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE (ISSN: 1941-5303) is published 13 times a year, monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue by Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com. Periodicals postage paid in South San Francisco, CA, and at additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail. Subscriptions: One year basic rate (12 issues) US: $18.00, Canada: US$26.00. Canadian orders must be prepaid. Canadian price includes postage and GST (GST #R128220688). PMA #40612608. Prepaid in US funds only. Subscriptions do not include newsstand specials. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to PlayStation: The Official Magazine, P.O. Box 5154, Harlan, IA 51593-0654. Ride-along enclosure in the following editions: None. Standard Mail enclosure in the following editions: None. Returns: Pitney Bowes, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US, Inc. also publishes @Gamer, Crochet Today!, Guitar Aficionado, Guitar World, Knitting Today!, Mac|Life, Maximum PC, Nintendo Power, The Official Xbox Magazine, PC Gamer, Revolver, Windows: The Official Magazine, and World of Warcraft Official Magazine. Entire contents copyright 2011, Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. Future US, Inc. is not affiliated with the companies or products covered in PlayStation: The Official Magazine. Reproduction on the Internet of the articles and pictures in this magazine is illegal without the prior written consent of PlayStation: The Official Magazine. Products named in the pages of PlayStation: The Official Magazine are trademarks of their respective companies. PRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

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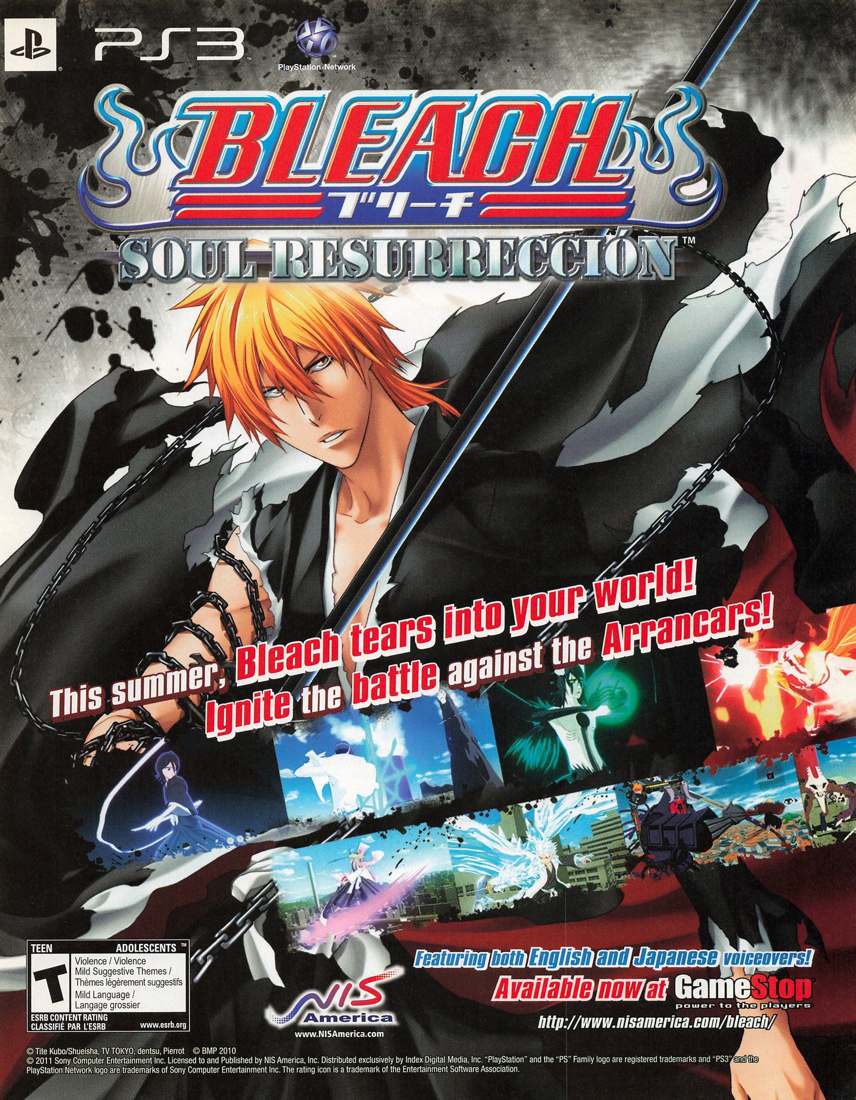
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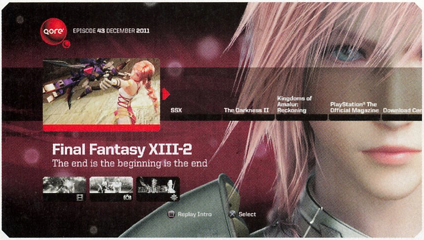
qore EPISODE 43 DECEMBER 2011

SSX

The Darkness II

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

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Final Fantasy XIII-2

The end is the beginning is the end

Replay Intro

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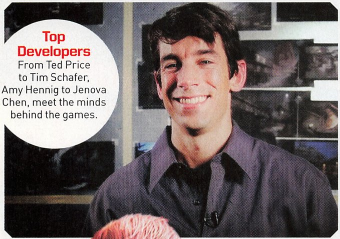
Previews of the Best Upcoming Games

Watch high-definition features on sure-to-be hits and sleepers you might not know about.



Top Developers

From Ted Price to Tim Schafer, Amy Hennig to Jenova Chen, meet the minds behind the games.

Celebrity Interviews

Our geek heroes reveal themselves, explaining how games affect their lives and careers.

PLUS

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See what's cool in New Orleans, Montreal, London, and around the world!

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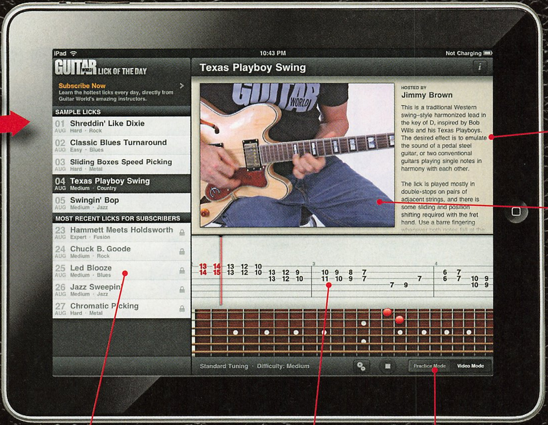

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- 26 AUG Jazz Sweepin – Medium · Jazz
- 27 AUG Chromatic Picking – Hard · Metal

Texas Playboy Swing

HOSTED BY
Jimmy Brown

This is a traditional Western swing-style harmonized lead in the key of D, inspired by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. The desired effect is to emulate the sound of a pedal steel guitar, or two conventional guitars playing single notes in harmony with each other.

The lick is played mostly in double-stops on pairs of adjacent strings, and there is some sliding and position shifting required with the fret hand. Use a barre fingering

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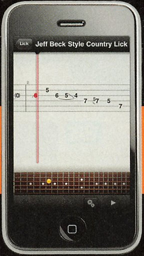

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The PlayStation Entertainment Plan

Fill up your life with our monthly guide

MONDAY **TUESDAY** **WEDNESDAY** **THURSDAY** **FRIDAY** **SATURDAY** **SUNDAY**

DEC 01

Happy Birthday JoCo

At the tender age of 41, Jonathon Coulton is continuing to make music we just can't get enough of. His newest album, *Artificial Heart*, was released this past September.

05

Prohibition Prohibited

This day in 1933 the 21st Amendment ended Prohibition, which is a blessing because without alcohol we're fairly certain we wouldn't survive Christmas.

06

We've got a Wicked Hangover

The Hangover: Part II—the sequel to one of the greatest dude-flicks to date—comes out on Blu-ray today, just in time for the holidays.

07

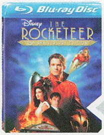
Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

70 years ago, a devastating attack on Pearl Harbor caused the U.S. to enter WWII. Today we remember and honor those lost on that tragic day.

08

First Day of Hanukkah

The Festival of Lights begins today, which means our Jewish friends will out-gift us at an 8:1 ratio.



13

Rocket Man

The 20th Anniversary Edition Blu-ray of *The Rocketeer* hits today, which means it's time for us to dig out our ol' rocket pack and make our family nervous again.

16

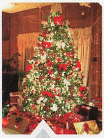
Chocolate Covered Anything Day

Last year we accepted the challenge and have since eaten chocolate covered bacon, bananas, flowers, and grasshoppers. Bring on 2012!

17

Alice in Birthday Land

Frankly, we don't care that Milla Jovovich's movies are awful. She's fun to look at and we have a sexy lady quota to fill. Happy Birthday, Milla.



21

Apollo 8 Away

This day in 1968 the second manned mission in the Apollo space program marked the first time humans saw the far side of the moon.

8
BORMAN LOVELL ANDERS

25

Christmas Day

So what if we pushed some kids down stairs and staged a few hobo fights? Santa doesn't really know what we've been up to, does he?

26

Kwanzaa Kicks Off

Apparently, it's possible to celebrate both Christmas and Kwanzaa. That's a two-for-one holiday deal right there.

27

Make a Cutout Snowflake Day

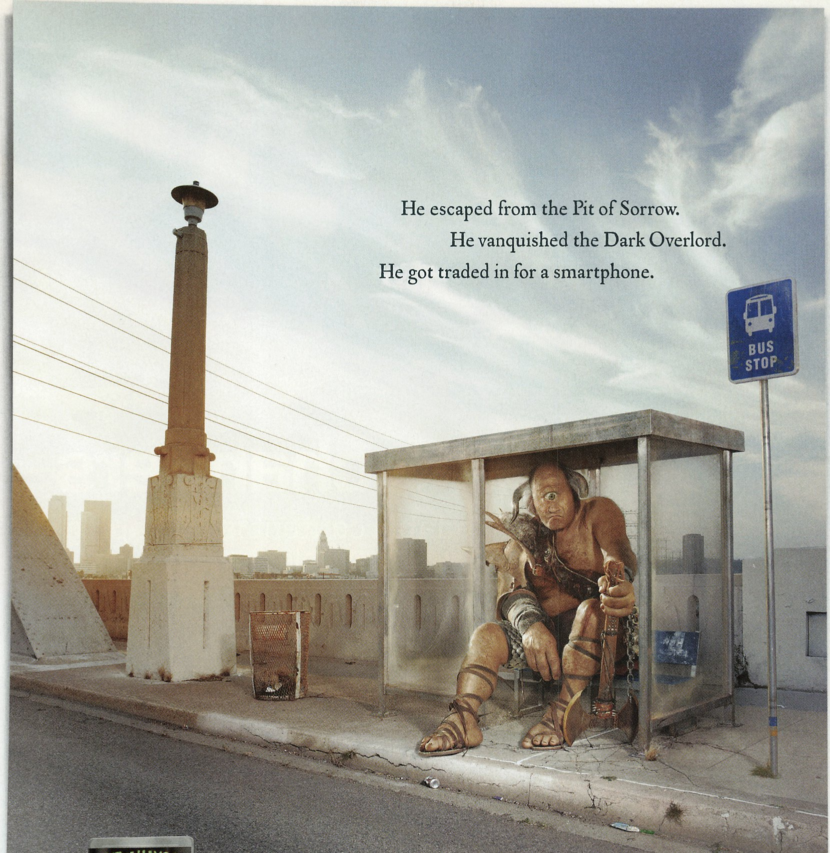
We're not really sure why this is a day that exists. But as long as it marks our calender, we'll be cutting out paper snowflakes like it's nobody's business.

31

New Year's Eve

This year our resolutions are to take better care of ourselves, read more, and stop setting people on fire (especially Ryan).

* Release dates are subject to change by the publishers.


He escaped from the Pit of Sorrow.
He vanquished the Dark Overlord.
He got traded in for a smartphone.
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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

Level Up
Level-5's highly anticipated JRPG *Ni no Kuni* is headed to the U.S.

▸▸Page 13

Brand New Home
We take an extended tour of PlayStation Home's redesign.

▸▸Page 14

Star Stories
Starhawk dev Dylan Jobe talks about crafting a sci-fi universe.

▸▸Page 18

RPG Heaven
A look at the wave of RPG titles making their way to PS Vita.

▸▸Page 20

The Great Debate
Anne Lewis lays out the pros and woes of multiple pre-order bonuses.

▸▸Page 24

1

Game changers

Downloadable content is reshaping the future of console gaming

There was a time, not so long ago, when a game's development life ended when it hit store shelves. There were no updates, no content downloads, and no extras. Now, thanks to the PS3 and PlayStation Network, developers can fix bugs, create new content, or even implement whole new design changes.

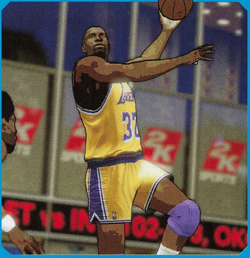
Admittedly, the seemingly endless tweaking and expansion of games can be irritating—after all, shouldn't a game be polished, functional, and *finished* at its release? But DLC can go beyond merely fixing a game's technical snafus or padding its profit margin—it's an opportunity for the savvy developer to perfect their work, add breadth to the play experience, and stimulate franchise loyalty. Look no further than these three massive, game-changing updates for proof that the introduction of post-release content has forever changed the future of console gaming.

Gran Turismo 5 Spec 2.0

The latest iteration of PlayStation's flagship racing sim was a thrilling ride, but *Gran Turismo 5* was not without its flaws. The disparity in visual presentation quality between standard cars and premium models, long load times, slow menu response, and A.I. issues were among the problems that held the game back from greatness. But *GT5's* recently released free Spec 2.0 update addresses all of these issues and offers enticing new features as well. Players can now pause gameplay during lengthy endurance races, adjust weather condition severity with a slider function, pose with a personalized avatar in Photo mode, and the Shuffle Race mode has been expanded to allow competition between racers of different skill levels. Spec 2.0 proves that post-release updates and DLC aren't just about minor bug fixes and gameplay enhancements anymore. Developers can now implement significant changes based off player feedback, correct ill-conceived or badly executed design decisions, and add whole new dimensions to gameplay without waiting for a franchise's next major installment.

NBA 2K12 Legends Showcase

We love the expertly crafted *NBA 2K12*, but its Legends Showcase DLC brings tons of new features we never knew we wanted. Presenting stunning cel-shaded visuals and including more than 150 of the NBA's most legendary players, this DLC lets us compete in pick-up games ranging from 1-on-1 to 5-on-5 in New York City's



▲ ProTip: We increased our defensive effectiveness by shouting "JORDAN!" everytime Magic took a shot.

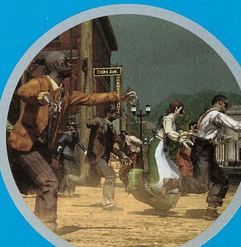
▲ It turns out standing still and screaming at a zombie doesn't really do any good. Go for the head next time!

> "I believed from the initial release of **Gran Turismo 5** that it would be the users that would make the game grow thereafter. You could say that this update is the shape and form of *GT5* that was created through the opinions of our fans."
>
> ***—Kazunori Yamauchi, President, Polyphony Digital***

Time Square. We can even participate in minigames like 21 and H-O-R-S-E. There's enough content here to create an entirely separate game; it's a testament to the potential of DLC and we hope more publishers and developers offer fun, innovative content that builds upon a game's core experience.

Red Dead Redemption Undead Nightmare

Remember when the undead invaded the Wild West of *Red Dead Redemption*? We certainly do. A zombie infestation in the early 1900s was most definitely a surprise (and a welcome one at that), but what's more interesting is that DLC can actually be an effective countermeasure for a game's creators to offset the financial impact of the used-game market. According to Strauss Zelnick, CEO of Take-Two Interactive, DLC can be quickly produced once a game's engine has been built. By creating engaging, must-experience DLC, it encourages players to hold on to a game rather than quickly reselling it. "If we can get people to hold onto their game for the first six weeks, the titles aren't in the stores in the used-game section, which means people have to buy the front-line title from us," says Zelnick. Are digital add-ons always built with the consumer in mind? Maybe. Maybe not. We do know one thing for sure: DLC can be a mutually beneficial concept, and we're curious to see how it continues to evolve into the future.



2 Blade brother

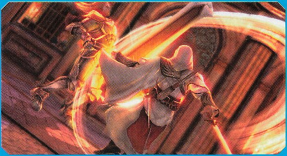
Assassin's Creed star Ezio Auditore joins the fraternity of SoulCalibur guest characters

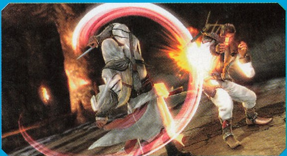
We're not quite sure how Ezio can see with that hood covering his eyes.

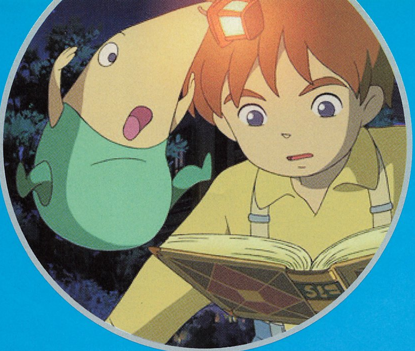
If the element of surprise is an assassin's greatest asset, then Ezio is truly a master. In perhaps the most unexpected fighting game cameo since Kratos showed up in the most recent *Mortal Kombat*, *Assassin's Creed's* Ezio Auditore will appear as a playable character in *SoulCalibur V*. The mind-blowing announcement certainly caught us off guard, but Ezio's inclusion makes so much sense it hurts.

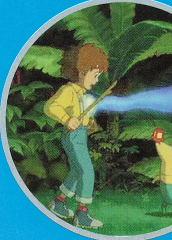
From his bladed weaponry to his theatrical outfit to his penchant for hand-to-hand combat, Ezio somehow feels right at home with the vaguely medieval sensibilities of *SoulCalibur*, whose roster features several similar sword swingers in lavish costumes. In fact, the Italian assassin was such a natural fit that the developers were able to remain remarkably true to the character: Ezio slices with his hidden blades for quick attacks, draws his sword for heavier hits, and finishes some combos with the recently-added crossbow. Even his unblockable ranged attack and Critical Edge special feature his Da Vinci-crafted gadgets (the wrist pistol and smoke bombs, respectively).

Naturally, his flowing white assassin's robe looks spectacular in motion, but our hands-on time proved he's far more than a flashy gimmick. His accessible style allowed us to easily overwhelm our opponents—including newly announced additions like Raphael, Nightmare, and the supernatural Viola—and finish them off with his signature phrase, "Requiescat in pace." With an excellent balance of speed, power, and damage resistance, Ezio could become an excellent standard option for series newcomers.









It's animation king Studio Ghibli's visuals that have us truly excited for this alluring RPG.

3

Anime attraction

Gorgeous JRPG Ni no Kuni is confirmed for U.S. release

Rolling hills dotted with waterfalls, mountains lining the horizon, a vast sea that is ours to cross, giant cats and magical imps… This is exactly what we'd expect of a world created by renowned Japanese animation and film house, Studio Ghibli—and our recent early look at *Ni no Kuni: Shiroki Seihai no Joou* (which translates to "Second Land: The Queen of White Sacred Ash") doesn't disappoint.

The fruit of a historic collaboration between Oscar-winning animation powerhouse Ghibli (*Spirited Away*, *Ponyo*) and JRPG heavyweight Level-5, the game is already looking like it will be one of PS3's most beautiful games. Its imaginative visuals evoke a wonder that rival classic PlayStation RPGs like *Final Fantasy VII* and *Dragon Quest*.

The demo we sampled featured a gorgeous sailing ship that Oliver—the 13 year-old hero—can use to freely roam the open sea. A map, itself a glorious piece of cartography, reveals a mighty realm to explore. The turn-based battle system sees Oliver capture *Pokémon*-style creatures called Imagens that can be sent into a fray on Oliver's behalf, or have him cast a spell or attack.

The fort town of Goroneru we visited was well populated with human and feline villagers wandering the streets. Details are evident everywhere: fireflies flittering on the breeze, oversized urns filled with sweets and cake to satisfy Oliver's hunger, while the door to, say, a magic-shop is decorated as a fearsome owl.

It all has us itching to begin exploring when *Ni no Kuni* comes to the U.S. in 2012.

4 Homecoming

Big changes are coming to Home and we get the guided tour

It's been a few months since we met with Sony's PlayStation Home team to discuss the complete redesign of the service's 3D layout. Now, we've finally gotten some hands-on time to explore each of Home's new districts, as well as a few of its new games. Trust us—if you haven't visited Home in a while, it's certainly worth checking out once the redesign goes live later this year.

Hub

This is the new log-in area of Home. All of Home's biggest new additions are featured here, and every other zone in the service can be reached by a central teleporter. Feeling a bit lost? Check out the Activity Board, which is full of fun, narrative-driven quests that are perfect for familiarizing players to Home's new layout. Best of all, there's a featured game at the center of the Hub (and every other district for that matter). Featured games are changed up every so often, ensuring we always have something new to play.

Action District

The Action District is appropriately named: this place is full of heart-pounding content. Militant troops stand watch on every street corner. Skeletons of wrecked vehicles are littered throughout the city. And that guy in the red shirt? We swear he's following us. Those with a taste for danger will feel right at Home here.

Sportswalk

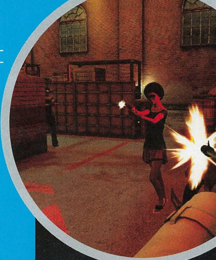
The Sportswalk zone is perfect for, well, sports nuts. This area features a sports bar packed with content. Scrolling marquees display live stat tickers of actual games, and those with a lot of sport smarts can display their knowledge in trivia games. We even spotted an actual stadium in the district's distance. Wonder what that's for...

Pier Park

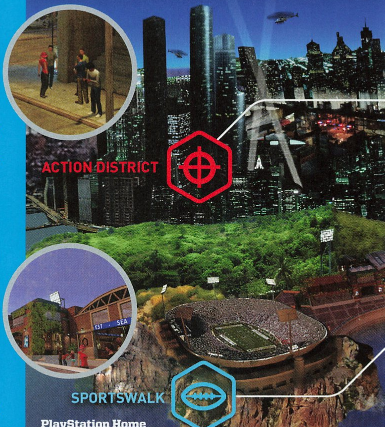
Dubbed the "fun for everyone" area, Pier Park houses lots of light-hearted games appropriate for all ages. The zone itself is fun to explore: a large ferris wheel spins overhead a central hangout spot, and the layout is akin to what we'd expect to find in a theme park.

Adventure District

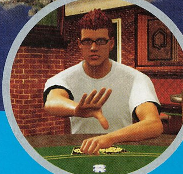
Little is known about the Adventure District. Not for lack of trying—we dug at the Home developers, but our burning questions were met only with smiles. They assure us that the Adventure District will be a perfect fit for those who enjoy games like *Uncharted*. But what will we find there? Treasure? Hidden items for our avatar? An endless supply of potato chips? We can't wait to find out.



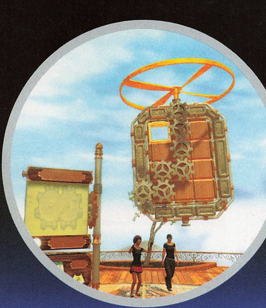
Bootleggers '29
Here's something we haven't seen in Home before: a fully functional FPS with four-on-four multiplayer action. The best part? Players control their avatars in this firefight. Siding up with either the Mob or the Feds, duke it out in a capture-the-barrel-style game. Just be careful—holding the barrel slows the carrier down.



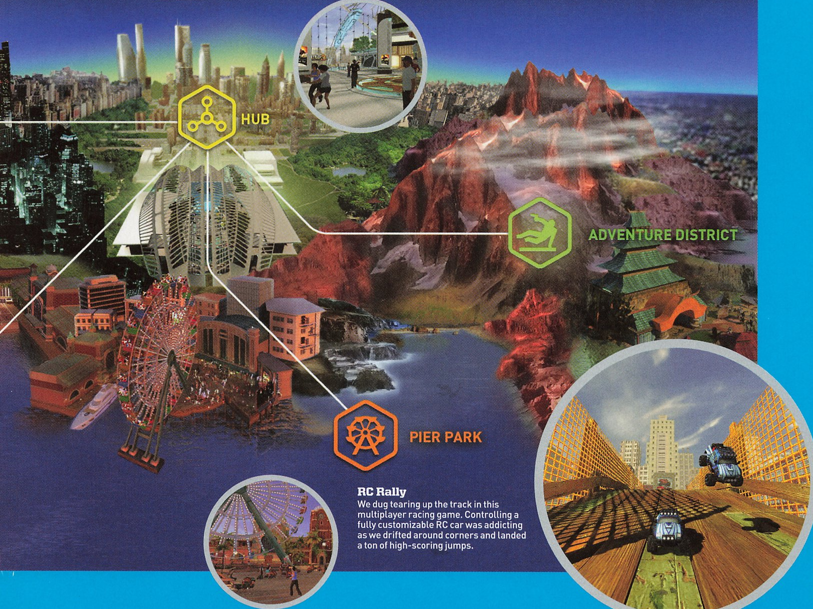
PlayStation Home Hold 'em
In the back of the sports bar exists a poker room, where players can back up their talk with a wad of (virtual) cash. Learning to play poker? Want to make some new friends? PlayStation Home Hold 'em is the perfect environment for both.



The Action District is appropriately named: this place is full of heart-pounding content.



Cogs
The Hub's featured game at launch will be *Cogs*, an award-winning indie puzzler. The premise is simple: slide a number of tiles to complete a variety of steampunk machines in as few moves as possible. Sound easy? Think again.



RC Rally
We dug tearing up the track in this multiplayer racing game. Controlling a fully customizable RC car was addicting as we drifted around corners and landed a ton of high-scoring jumps.

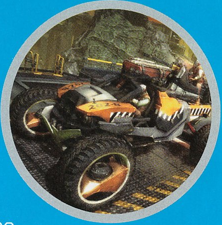
OCTANE SIPPY CUP.

HYUNDAI | NEW THINKING.
NEW POSSIBILITIES.

Veloster
open
closed

Getting up to 40 MPG Highway is nothing to whine about—that's over 500 highway miles per tank. And with the help of our Eco-Coach technology, you'll become an expert on how to drive the Veloster farther on less. YouTube.com/VELOSTER. **Engineered for whatever.**

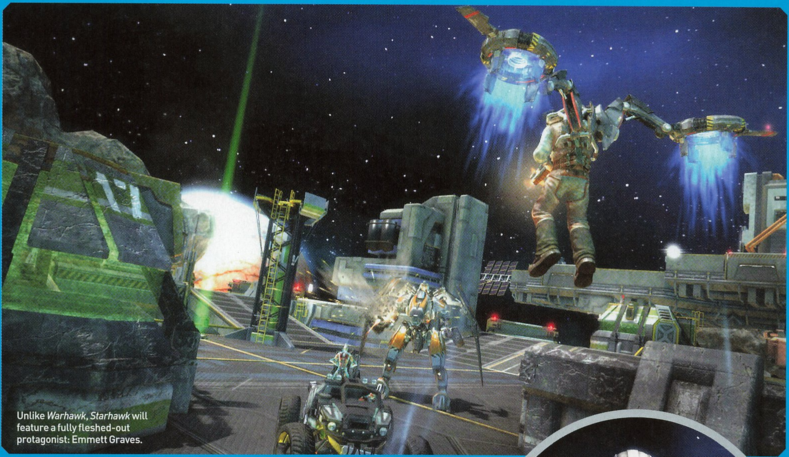
2012 Veloster M/T 28 City/40 Hwy. EPA Estimates. Actual mileage may vary. Eco-Coach technology requires a Blue Link® subscription service agreement. Blue Link features and fees vary by subscription plan. For additional details and system limitations, visit HyundaiBlueLink.com or see your local Hyundai dealer. Only use Blue Link and corresponding devices when it is safe to do so. Hyundai is a registered trademark of Hyundai Motor America. All rights reserved. ©2011 Hyundai Motor America.



5 Stellar story

Creating Starhawk's compelling new universe

"What we realized very early on is that *Starhawk* couldn't just be systems and mechanics based."
***Dylan Jobe**-President, LightBox Interactive*



Unlike *Warhawk*, *Starhawk* will feature a fully fleshed-out protagonist: Emmett Graves.

The first PS3 title to simultaneously launch as a retail SKU and PlayStation Store download, *Warhawk* was a pioneering game. Its multiplayer-only focus was a console rarity back in 2007, and while the online shooter won fans over with its vehicle-centric combat, the lack of single-player content and storytelling held the game back for some.

"The mechanics were crazy fun, but the universe was just hollow for all intents and purposes," admits Dylan Jobe, director on *Warhawk* and president of LightBox Interactive. In 2009, Jobe took his team from the now-shuttered Incognito Entertainment to form LightBox, where they're now putting the final touches on spiritual sequel *Starhawk*.

Shaping the Stars

While its predecessor was somewhat grounded in reality, *Starhawk* is a full-on science fiction affair set on a colony called the Frontier, where the emergence of Rift energy has divided the people and caused conflict. *Starhawk* again delivers large-scale 32-player online battles (complete with flying mech suits and defensive structures that drop in from space), but it also features a single-player campaign with an identifiable protagonist.

"What we realized very early on is that *Starhawk* couldn't just be systems and mechanics based," says Jobe. "We found for a variety of reasons that crafting a good universe and foreground character made the experience far more compelling."

Storytellers often decide on key characters and conflicts before building out an extensive universe to support them, but LightBox opted to tackle that process in reverse for *Starhawk*. Early on, the studio brought in concept artists Ryan Church and Iain McCaig—whose shared film credits include the *Star Wars* prequels and the upcoming *John Carter*—to lay down roots for the Western-tinged sci-fi universe. According to Jobe, this process ensured that the game had a wealth of storylines and scenarios available to support a deeply immersive narrative experience. It was only after the core backdrop was established that writer Koen Wooten was recruited to shape the key characters and events for the game.

Outside the Box

Jobe doesn't have particularly glowing things to say about the current state of videogame writing, however. "I mean no disparaging words by this, but there's a lot of bad writing in videogames," he says, citing games like *BioShock* and *Portal* as rare examples of storytelling done right. *Starhawk* won't deliver awkward narrative lumps between missions, and will instead relay the story throughout the campaign via the regular introduction of new information and characters. "I feel like we're finding really creative ways to hit the emotional beats," Jobe explains.

In creating lead character Emmett Graves—a former Rift miner who becomes infected with the dangerous energy—Jobe says the team avoided designing a hero that resembles the typical shooter lead. "There are a lot of stereotypes, and unfortunately I think a lot of big games feel pressure from marketing teams and the corporate machine who say, 'We know how to market hot chicks, big muscles, and guns.' You really have to stand your ground."

Starhawk's release date isn't yet pinned down, but it will take flight sometime in 2012.

The Big 10

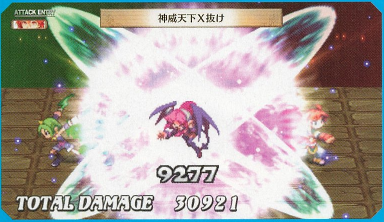
Stories everyone's talking about

SONY
PS VITA
SELECT
START

6

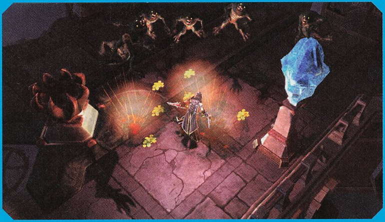
On a role

Ten reasons why the future of RPGs is on PlayStation Vita


ATTACK ENTRY
神威天下X抜け
9277
TOTAL DAMAGE 30921

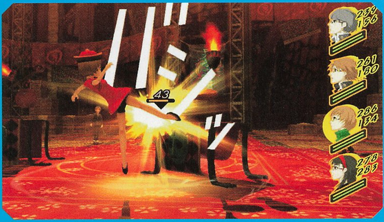
Disgaea 3: Absence of Detention Pub **NIS America** Dev **Nippon Ichi**

A quirky tactical RPG, PS Vita's *Disgaea 3* contains four new scenarios, two new characters, and all of the DLC from the PS3 version. Beyond the addition of touch controls, we can earn bonus experience points for simply carrying our Vita around. We can also view the game stats of other *Disgaea 3* owners.



Ruin Pub **SCEA** Dev **San Diego Studio/Idol Minds**

Described as a social action RPG, *Ruin* takes dungeon crawler standards and throws in some interactive twists by aiming to make our adventures public. Rivals will constantly seek to topple our lair, especially if we brag about it. Adding another level of connectivity, games can be saved and resumed across both PS3 and Vita.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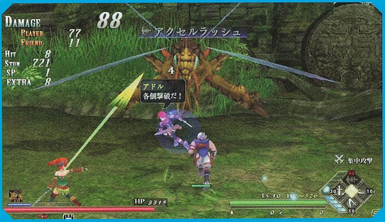
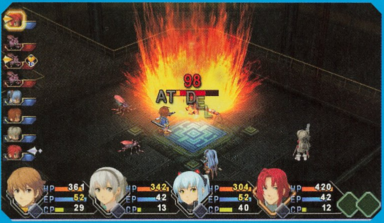
Persona 4: The Golden Pub **Atlus USA** Dev **Atlus**

Persona 4 built on everything that made *Persona 3* fantastic. The Vita release will have a new character, additional event scenes, more outfits, new personas, and wireless messaging to allow us to receive help in dungeons. While Atlus claims there are still a few surprises in store, there will not be a new playable female character added as there was in *Persona 3 Portable*.


DAMAGE 88
PLAYER 77
FRIEND 11
HIT 8
STUN 721
SP 1
EXTRA 8
アクセルラッシュ
アドル
各個撃破だ！
集中攻撃
HP 3315
Lv 10 HP 326

Ys Celceta: Sea of Trees Pub **Nihon Falcom** Dev **Nihon Falcom**

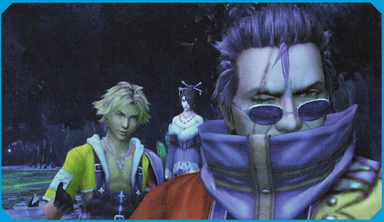
Nihon Falcom has quickly become a major RPG developer for Sony's handhelds, and is remaking the fourth game in its *Ys* (pronounced "ease") series for Vita. The series' history can be confusing, as there are two versions of the fourth *Ys* title, though neither version was actually developed by Falcom. This release will feature touch-based puzzles and a battle system like that of PSP game *Ys Seven*.



The Legend of Heroes: Zero no Kiseki

Pub/ Dev **Nihon Falcom**

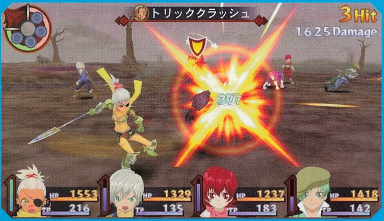
This massive, story-driven RPG kept Japanese PSP gamers busy in 2010, and now Falcom is reviving it on Vita with loads of voice acting. The series sports tons of dialogue making localization a rough go considering this is the third game after *Trails in the Sky*, but the series might find broader support with a Vita release.



Final Fantasy X

Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Square Enix**

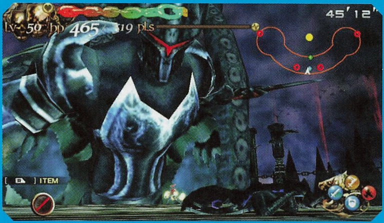
What better way to celebrate the 10th anniversary of *Final Fantasy X* than a high-definition release for both Vita and PS3? While there's no word as to whether this will be the *International* version of the game or not, we can't help but hope for some new features. *FFX's* return also fuels hope that more PS2 *Final Fantasy* games will be released for Vita.



Tales of Innocence R

Pub Namco Bandai Dev Tales Studio

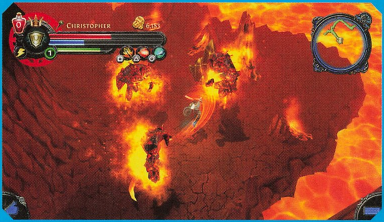
Tales of Innocence—a main series title—is seeing its second release, though this version goes far beyond a mere port. Namco Bandai has reworked the story, added voice acting, and worked in additional characters and scenarios. We can even use touch controls to issue commands to party members. Namco passed on bringing *Innocence* to North America once; let's hope history doesn't repeat itself.



Lord of Apocalypse

Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Access Games**

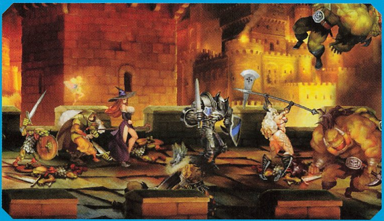
A follow-up to *Lord of Arcana*, *Lord of Apocalypse* looks to be another attempt by Square Enix to jump on the popular (at least in Japan) monster-hunting bandwagon. Set as a Vita launch title in Japan, up to four players can team up to take down massive beasts in the game. Hopefully this one will be playable online as well.



Dungeon Hunter: Alliance

Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Gameloft**

Dungeon Hunter: Alliance is a loot-collecting, action RPG where we choose between a warrior, mage, or rogue, and team up with online friends to tackle over 30 randomly generated dungeons. Though the game doesn't appear drastically different from its PSN version, we hope that the online support will be tweaked for Vita.



Dragon's Crown

Pub **Ignition Entertainment** Dev **Vanillaware**

Vanillaware, the developer of *Odin Sphere*, is now bringing us a lovely 2D sidescrolling action RPG for Vita. *Dragon's Crown* will feature online co-op for four-players and interoperability with the game's PS3 version. With one of six different character types to choose from, we'll be able to customize our character's growth as we fight huge bosses and collect powerful weapons on our own or with friends.

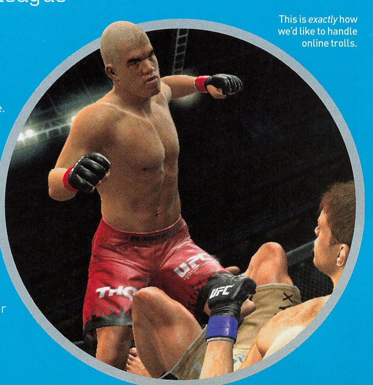
7 Undisputed Online Championship

Passionate UFC gamers create an online league

Online gaming is a double-edged sword. Sure, we love playing multiplayer with our friends—but what about when we hop online for a quick match with strangers? Sometimes these experiences are pleasant, but more often than not we're forced to endure shockingly inelegant language and a barrage of name-calling from ill-tempered man-children.

Sometimes, though, like-minded players unite in hopes of ensuring the best experience online gaming has to offer. Such is the case with Undisputed Online Championship, an online (and quite friendly) MMA league created by fans of THQ's *UFC* fighting franchise. Formed shortly after the release of *UFC: Undisputed 2009*, UOC allows gamers to participate in a fantasy UFC career with custom-made fighters. After signing up on UOC's website at undisputedonline.net, players can participate in bi-weekly events (modeled after real UFC fights) and compete for a championship belt. Entry and competition are entirely free.

Since its inception, UOC has gained more than 6,700 members and has hosted more than 53 events. While fights are still being held for *UFC: Undisputed 2010*, the UOC team is working on new additions for January's *UFC Undisputed 3* release, including Pride fighting tournaments and side-league events for kickboxing. Our fighting skills may not be up to par, but it's nice to know there's a place for us to virtually assault other gamers without receiving a verbal beat down in return.



This is *exactly* how we'd like to handle online trolls.

8 Trophy top guns... Part 2

Meet PlayStation's most decorated gamer

We ran an article in our November issue featuring duck360, the world's number one team of PlayStation Trophy collectors. Admittedly, we were surprised by the subsequent outcry from readers who were upset that a team of four had combined their Trophy-collecting efforts under the guise of one PSN ID. To even out the playing field, we talked with the world's number two Trophy holder: Hakoom, a lone gamer from Bahrain. We picked his brain to find out how he manages to maintain his number two spot without a team to back him up.

What's a typical day like as a hardcore Trophy hunter? How do you get so many games?

I have been hunting Platinums for over three years now, averaging a bit over 100 per year. I get a lot of support from my fans and friends. They send me games overseas, and my friends let me borrow their games. I usually play around 15 hours per day, but sometimes I spend two to three days playing non-stop. I know it's crazy, but I love it.

What's the hardest part about holding your spot?

The hardest challenge is dealing with a community that accuses me of hacking and cheating, and I have always proved them wrong by releasing posts and videos explaining what went wrong and what happened with some Trophies.

How exactly do users "hack" to get Trophies?

Well, this all started with save hacks. Users can upload altered save files that unlock nearly all Trophies in a game instantly. Many people do this. I have never used a Trophy save hack.

Has Trophy hunting changed the way you play games?

To be honest, it's fun to do something different while playing...but sometimes Trophies turn a good game into a bad game because of they way they're designed. It's just like other things in life: you can't stop once you're hooked.

Any games you just can't seem to Platinum?

There's just this one game I quit: *Skate 2*. The game is easy, but the controls just don't want to work for me and I just didn't want to bother with it anymore. Maybe in the future I will come back to it.

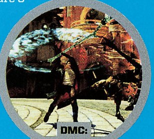
Any advice for serious Trophy collecting?

Always try your best, and be ready to face the Trophy community once you get a high profile. And when you play a hard game, always let your frustrations out.

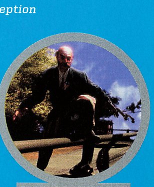
9 The Readers' Most Wanted

Thank the PlayStation gods, *BioShock Infinite* has finally joined our Most Wanted list! We're sure everyone's relieved that PTOM can stop incessantly whining about the game's absence. Meanwhile, *Modern Warfare 3* continues its reign in the number one spot, while *DmC: Devil May Cry* and *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* made strong gains. But where's *Twisted Metal*?! Time to start whining...

01 *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*
02 *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*
03 *Metal Gear Solid: Rising*
04 *Battlefield 3*
05 *DmC: Devil May Cry*
06 *Final Fantasy XIII-2*
07 *Final Fantasy XIV Online*
08 *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City*
09 *Need for Speed: The Run*
10 *BioShock Infinite*
11 *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*
12 *Street Fighter X Tekken*
13 *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*
14 *SoulCalibur V*
15 *Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3*
16 *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*
17 *Mass Effect 3*
18 *Saints Row: The Third*
19 *Max Payne 3*
20 *Ico & Shadow of the Colossus Collection*



DMC: DEVIL MAY CRY



BIOSHOCK INFINITE

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of Ipsos OTX MediaCT's GamePlan Insights. All games are PS3 titles. Polling period was October 2, 2011 to October 15, 2011.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

10 Are pre-order bonuses really bonuses?

Worthy rewards or wicked temptresses? To Anne Lewis, they're both.

No

Says the indecisive intern **Anne Lewis**

I have trouble deciding which pair of socks to put on in the morning. What makes you think I can choose between all of the pre-order bonuses out there? It's bad enough that I have the urge to pre-order anything in the first place, but for Amazon, GameStop, Best Buy, etc. to tempt me with different bits of DLC or pieces of schwag is simply cruel. Maybe I just feel like I'm being manipulated into buying from one place or another.

As someone who works for an unnamed game retailer, I have developed a hatred toward pre-ordering anything. Why should I have to pay early to "reserve" my copy? Isn't it enough that I'm buying the game in the first place? The worst part is I'll miss out on a bonus if I don't have the cash to buy my game within the first week or so of its launch.

I don't want this whole argument to come off as "woe is me, they're trying to give me free things." I know for a fact that's where my ignoramus of an opponent will take it. I appreciate free stuff, but if I purchase a game at full price anyway, I should get the same perks I would've gotten if I had put down five bucks the week before it came out. That reminds me—I need to go put a down payment on *Mass Effect 3*.

Yes

Says the schwag-loving gamer **Anne Lewis**

Oh hush you silly fool. Of course your argument is based around woe and despair! There's nothing wrong with companies choosing to bless those who order their game in advance with content bonuses. Right now I have a pre-order list of at least 10 games, and that's because they all have bonuses I need. Not want, *need*. Of course you're being manipulated—that's the point of offering pre-order perks.

Sure, it would be nice if we could all get free things whenever we want, but we don't live in that kind of world, Anne. It's too hard for you to choose which bonus you want when multiple places offer different options? Are you seriously complaining? I don't often talk like this, but you're being a whiny little girl.

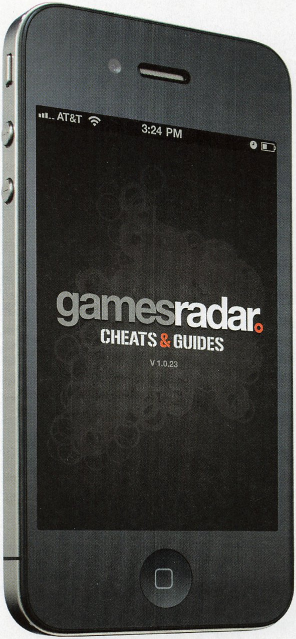
What about when companies offer the same bonus? Then it doesn't even matter where you pre-order from. If you don't want to pay early, try online pre-orders. Some places don't even make you pay a deposit on a game.

I think it's actually easier to pay off games when you pre-order them because you can pay a little at a time over the course of a few months. But that's a bit too logical for you, isn't it Anne? Lord, sometimes it's so embarrassing being me.

“★★★★★”

Amazing app, and it's FREE!

by Vitsnuklz



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Previews

Lightning's fate is one of *FFXIII-2*'s central mysteries, so she's gotta show up, right?

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **January 2012** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Square Enix**

Final Fantasy XIII-2

Back to the tubular future

Much has changed since we last stepped foot in the world of *Final Fantasy XIII*. The crystal pillar that separates the earth-like Gran Pulse from the floating city of Cocoon still stands, a constant reminder of the sacrifices made by Vanille and Fang so the world might survive. New life springs up in new towns, especially in New Bodhum, a colony located at the base of the pillar, created by the vigilante group NORA (No Obligations, Rules, or Authority). Without the magic of the fal'Cie (the false gods who ruled over Cocoon), humans must now rely on their own technology and live off the land.

It's been three years since the events of *FFXIII* and things are very different now, especially for *FFXIII-2* protagonist Serah Farron. Her sister, Lightning, is still missing; most presume her to be dead, but Serah's intuition tells her otherwise. To make matters worse, Snow—Serah's fiancé—set off to reunite the two sisters, but he too has mysteriously disappeared as well.

In the midst of Serah's confusion from having seemingly lost the two most important people in her life, disaster strikes. A meteorite falls from the sky and lands on the beach outside New Bodhum, creating spatial distortions and unleashing vicious monsters that threaten the town and its inhabitants. One bloodthirsty creature sets its sites on Serah; moments before she is assaulted, a mysterious fighter appears to save her. This dark-haired stranger tosses Serah a bow blade—a cross between a bow and sword—to help her fend off the assailants. The battle is won and the young man introduces himself as Noel Kreiss.

This is where things get tricky: Noel is from the distant future. In his timeline, the human race has been completely wiped out. As mankind's only survivor, he's found a way to travel back in time in hopes of preventing human extinction. He promises to help Serah find Lightning if she'll join him in his quest, and the two embark on a journey through time using a mysterious portal that appears near the fallen meteorite. Still with us so far? Time travel's a pretty complex concept. ▸▸

Quick Pitch

Soul Sisters

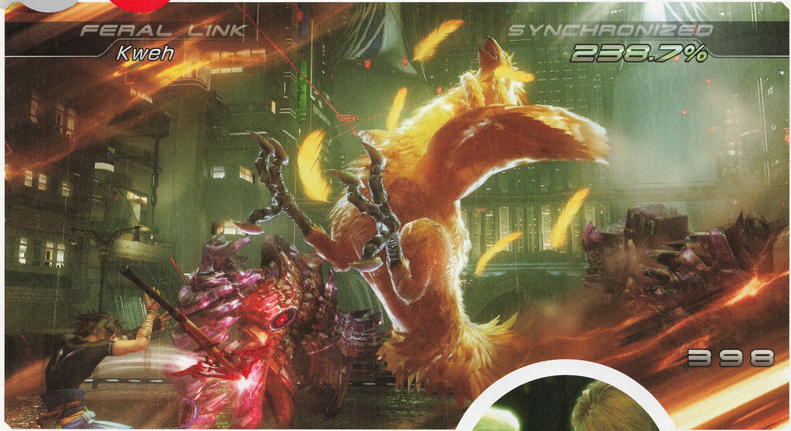
FFXIII heroine Lightning is either dead or missing. Her sister Serah is determined to find her.

Time Travel

The appearance of mysterious time gates changes everything. Will they lead to salvation or doom?

Take Two

FFXIII's linear progression and lack of exploration raised its fanbase's ire. Is *XIII-2* a redo or a renewal?



We can capture and recruit monsters to join our party.

Playing With Time

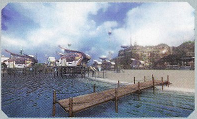
According to Noel, these portals act as time gates; by passing through them, he and Serah can travel to other periods in time and possibly locate Lightning.

The pair step through the New Bodhum gate and find themselves hurtling through the Historia Crux, a solitary plane that connects different realities. The Crux allows us to open and enter various gates, or even adjust a timeline to explore alternate realities of a single location. We might find ourselves exploring a familiar area (say, New Bodhum), but hundreds of years in the past or future. Once we use the Crux to enter a gate, enemies won't appear on our map. Instead, a Mog Clock alerts us to monsters within striking distance. Once a target is detected, we can begin battles with bonuses by initiating a pre-emptive attack. Hesitate, however, and we

Tabula Rasa Changes to Final Fantasy XIII's reality

Saving Worlds
Three years ago mankind stared into the face of extinction when Cocoon nearly crashed into Gran Pulse. The sphere's fall was halted when Fang and Vanille summoned a massive pedestal to keep Cocoon aloft. The two now rest, crystallized, within the pillar. In *FFXIII-2* it's believed Lightning also made the same sacrifice. The letters AF, "After the Fall," now mark each subsequent year.

The Gran Elevator
Machines once run by the fal'Cie are now powered by human technology. Driving this progress is the Academy, a research group poised to take a leading role in state affairs. The Gran Elevator is an ambitious project that will travel along the crystal pillar and transport materials from inside Cocoon to the city springing up at its base. The elevator is scheduled for completion in 4AF.



New Bodhum, 3AF
On the surface of Gran Pulse, Noel Kreiss heralds the appearance of a time gate outside of a NORA colony. Other portals accompanied by time/space paradoxes begin to emerge. Noel convinces Serah he can help her find Lightning using these portals. Stepping into the gate, they begin their search. But what hidden motives—if any—does this dark-haired stranger harbor?

Can't Wait? Play this

GREATEST HITS
PS3
FINAL FANTASY XIII
T
SQUARE ENIX

Final Fantasy XIII
(PS3, 2010)
In PTOM's April 2010 issue, reviewer Carolyn Gudmundson said: "Whether you agree with the new design choices, everything in *FFXIII* was deliberately and carefully considered. Yes, you may feel like you're traveling through a tube, but it's the most awesome tube we've ever traversed."
VERDICT: 10

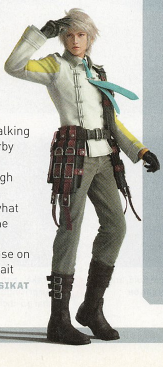
△ *FFXIII-2* looks to offer all the spectacle the series is known for.

could be penalized by fighting against fully alert creatures. *FFXIII-2* also employs a refined version of the Active Time Battle (ATB) system, but be prepared for key battles to culminate in Cinematic Action Sequences—quick-time events that, if failed, can cost us victory.

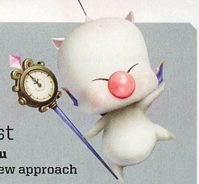
Homecoming

After exiting the Historia Crux, Noel and Serah soon find themselves amidst the Bresha Ruins, approximately two years ahead of the timeline they had left. Here we discover a dormant time gate. These portals must be unlocked with devices known as Artefacts, which must be hunted across multiple timelines. Thankfully, Serah's bow blade reveals its true form: a talking moogle adept at detecting nearby Artefacts.

Where will our journey through time lead? What happened to Lightning? More importantly, what catastrophic event wiped out the human race in Noel's future? Thankfully, with *FFXIII-2's* release on the horizon, we won't have to wait much longer to find out. **JARIK SIKAT**



Q&A



Learning From the Past

Devs Yoshinori Kitase and Motomu Toriyama speak about *FFXIII-2's* new approach

By creating legendary titles such as *Final Fantasy VIII* and *Final Fantasy X*, series' producer Yoshinori Kitase and director Motomu Toriyama have made an indelible impact on videogame history. *Final Fantasy XIII* became the fastest-selling title in the franchise's history with over one million units shipped in the first five days of its North American release.

Kitase

Speaking with Kitase and Toriyama through an interpreter, they would often pause before rendering a carefully worded response to our questions. But when we asked what their biggest learning experience was from *FFXIII*, they replied in English without hesitation: "Linear is bad!" Given the laughter and tongue-in-cheek nature of their response, they might not wholly agree with thestatement—but the duo took fan feedback very seriously for *FFXIII-2*.

Toriyama

As Kitase explains, consumer testing for a core *Final Fantasy* title is typically conducted once or twice, near the end of the game's development cycle. Since *FFXIII-2's* world was already established in *FFXIII*, more time and attention could be spent on balancing the game, adds Toriyama. Different versions of the game are being evaluated by players in key regions around the world throughout the new game's development, with the team continually making adjustments over the course of the development process. This is something Kitase and Toriyama refuse to take lightly. Their team is fully prepared to receive feedback and make further adjustments as necessary, at any given time.

The pair is on a mission. If *Final Fantasy XIII-2* is a game about traveling through time and resolving the past, maybe the same can be said about Kitase and Toriyama's ultimate objective.

In preparation for the sequel, they readily admit to consuming healthy doses of time-travel films and TV shows to draw inspiration. But *FFXIII-2* isn't just about revisiting the world of *FFXIII*—it's essentially a second chance at developing a world rife with characters and events that the series' fans will forever adore. As such, it should come as no surprise when a character in the game confides: "The future is the thing we can change... Without the past, I wouldn't be who I am now."

HANDS-ON Format **PS Vita** ETA **2012** Pub **SCEA** Dev **SCE Bend Studio**

Uncharted Golden Abyss

Taking adventure in hand

Mere minutes into our most recent hands-on foray with *Uncharted: Golden Abyss*, a startling realization emerged: This isn't a portable game as we've traditionally defined it. It's not some de-contented, control-crippled sideshow meant to satiate the fanbase between full-blown franchise entries. No, *Abyss* is a true *Uncharted* game, and it is glorious.

Our playtest began inside a dingy Central American prison cell as we helped Nathan Drake escape with the assistance of newcomer Marisa Chase. In standard *Uncharted*-game fashion, directing Drake to freedom required mastering a mix of stealth kills, melee brawls, and gunplay while navigating our hero up, over, and around environmental obstacles.

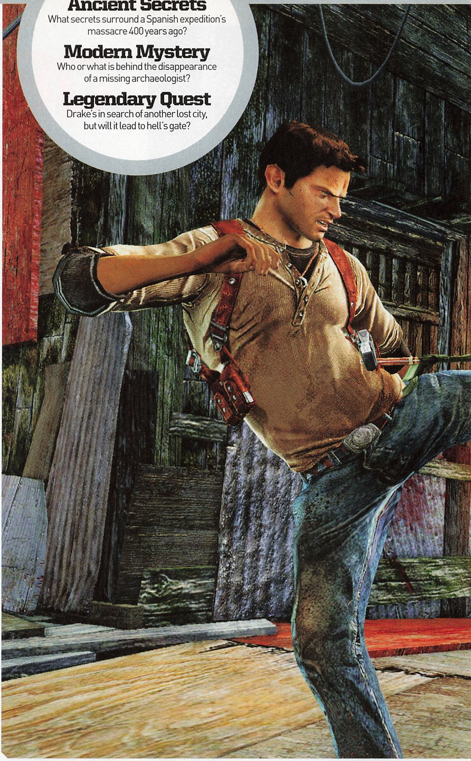
The difference this time around is the variety of ways in which we guide Drake through these challenges. Developer Bend Studio has spent considerable effort incorporating Vita's expanded control interface into *Abyss*. The portable system's gyros were put into good effect when we balanced Drake across a narrow beam, and tilting the handheld helped us aim our weapon during firefights. Climbing walls and leaping to ledges can now be accomplished by simply tapping the desired destination on the touchscreen. Tapping an on-screen icon also let us access a machete which we used to slash through obstructions by mimicking quick-time-event–style gesture prompts. Too easy? Just stick to the traditional stick and button control inputs for the familiar *Uncharted* experience we all know and love. **ROGER BURCHILL**

Quick Pitch

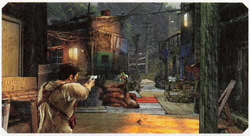
Ancient Secrets
What secrets surround a Spanish expedition's massacre 400 years ago?

Modern Mystery
Who or what is behind the disappearance of a missing archaeologist?

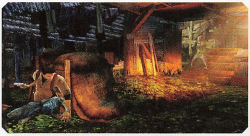
Legendary Quest
Drake's in search of another lost city, but will it lead to hell's gate?



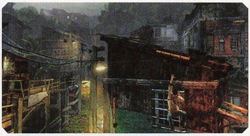
Traversing the Abyss



① The Vita's dual analog sticks allow it to seamlessly recreate PS3-quality shooter action, but the motion-assisted aiming is helpful.



② Moving in and out of cover is simple and fluid, and enemies who carelessly loiter nearby can be taken out with a tap of the screen.



③ Drake's path to traverse the environment is surprisingly easy to identify on Vita's super-sharp 5-inch OLED screen.

Cast List

THE FRANCHISE

Nathan Drake
A younger, pre-*Drake's Fortune* Drake

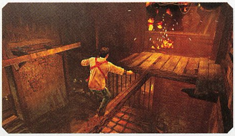
THE FLING?

Marisa Chase
Searching for her missing grandfather

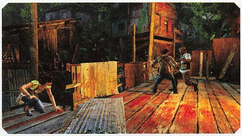
THE FRIEND?

Jason Dante
An old friend, but a trustworthy one?

▲ Anyone who'd wear that shirt deserves a beatdown. Drake's happy to oblige.

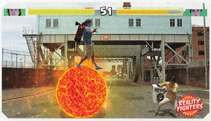


4 Whether by design or by Vita's nature, the gyro-based gameplay seemed better integrated than most PS3 Sixaxis moments.



5 Marisa doesn't like weapons so she's not much help when the shooting starts, but she is quite intelligent and resourceful.

Could Be a Contender



Format **PS Vita** ETA **2012** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Novarama**

Reality Fighters

Our own little fight club

The premise

A fighting game built for both hardcore genre fans and casual gamers alike. We can superimpose images of our own faces over custom-built fighters, and Vita's augmented reality capabilities let us turn any environment into a fighting arena.

The reality

Reality Fighters is just as silly as it sounds, but it's packed with a surprising level of fighting strategy. The AR function ensures every stage is unique.

The hook

In addition to an endless variety of fighting stages, a huge array of customizing options means one brawler will never be the same as another. We can choose from a variety of fighting styles and equip any combination of more than 400 clothing and accessory options for our brawler.

The chances

The fighting game genre is a tough one to break into. *Reality Fighters* might just have the proper mix of deep combat mechanics and over-the-top customization we've been craving in a portable fighter.

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YOU WILL LEARN GUITAR"
– GUITAR WORLD

"WE'RE BLOWN AWAY...
DEVELOP REAL SKILLS"
– GIBSON GUITAR

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TEEN
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Lyrics
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PS3
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*Requires guitar to have 1/4" output jack.

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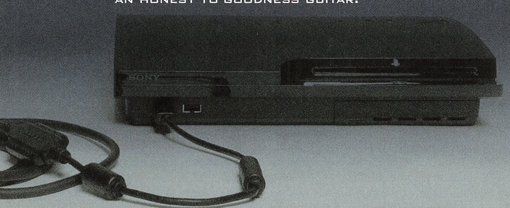

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Quick Pitch

Multiplayer

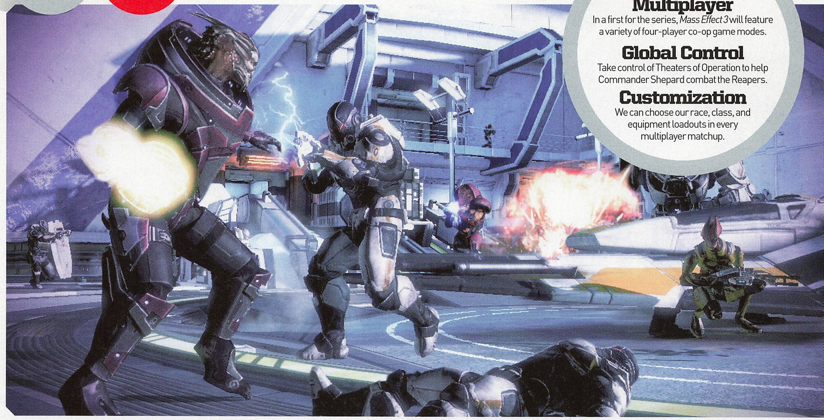
In a first for the series, *Mass Effect 3* will feature a variety of four-player co-op game modes.

Global Control

Take control of Theaters of Operation to help Commander Shepard combat the Reapers.

Customization

We can choose our race, class, and equipment loadouts in every multiplayer matchup.



▲ Ammo and health are replenished between waves of enemies...assuming we survive that long.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **March 2012** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **BioWare**

Mass Effect 3

Bringing out the big guns

Dev Talk

"One thing we're definitely trying to do is increase the amount of RPG elements we have in *Mass Effect 3*. More customization, more progression, more upgrades, more modifications. Our goal is to carry all that over into the multiplayer campaign as well."

Aaryn Flynn
Studio General Manager,
BioWare Edmonton

Saving the galaxy from a race of giant, murderous machines can be a daunting task, even for Commander Shepard. Now, thanks to BioWare's decision to add multiplayer to *Mass Effect 3*, we won't have to face the Reapers alone.

"We've thought about multiplayer for a long time at the studio, and with *Mass Effect*," says Aaryn Flynn, studio general manager of BioWare Edmonton. "For us, though, it was really important that we had a story element to it, a reason to put multiplayer in. It's not just Shepard going off and fighting to stop the Reapers—everyone has to get involved."

We recently got a hands-on taste of *Mass Effect 3's* co-op multiplayer addition—and it's lookin' pretty darn good. So how does it work? Up to four players can play together in various game modes to capture strategic zones dubbed Theaters of Operation. Capturing these areas can directly impact the single-player campaign, though BioWare wouldn't reveal any specifics. "There will be bonuses and things that are unlocked as you play [multiplayer]," Flynn says. "That said, we are trying to make sure that players who only want to play the single-player campaign have nothing walled off."

As for the action itself, the demo we played was rather straightforward. We hunkered down in a map called Slums, tasked with surviving waves of Cerberus troops. All was going fine and dandy until we were given an additional objective: deactivate a series of explosives. We holed up in a building and frantically worked to disarm a bomb. Outside, an army was closing in. The Turian Soldier next to us chucked a fragmentation grenade through the nearest window, buying us precious time. In the panic that ensued, our team's Adept used his Singularity ability, creating a temporary black hole that incapacitated several enemy goons. We forced the enemy commander to the ground using our Push skill, allowing our team to focus fire and take him out. Soon, his troops followed suit.

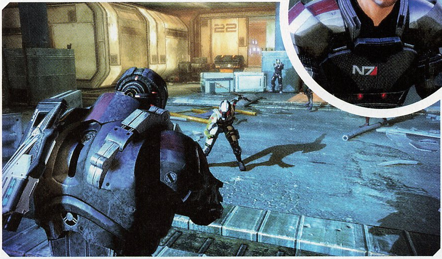
Only by tapping into the abilities of each playable class were we able to survive. Successfully killing Cerberus goons and completing objectives netted us a fat chunk of experience points and cash, which could be used to level up and purchase loadout modifications.

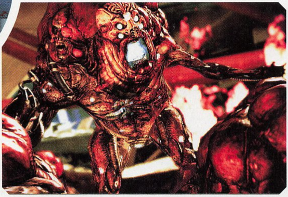
We don't yet know what other types of game modes will be available, or exactly *how* the multiplayer will affect Shepard's quest—but we do know we're eager to kick alien ass all over the galaxy with our friends once *Mass Effect 3* launches next year.

RYAN TALJONICK

Each class is equipped with different weapons, gadgets, and abilities. A healthy mix of classes helps ensure survival.

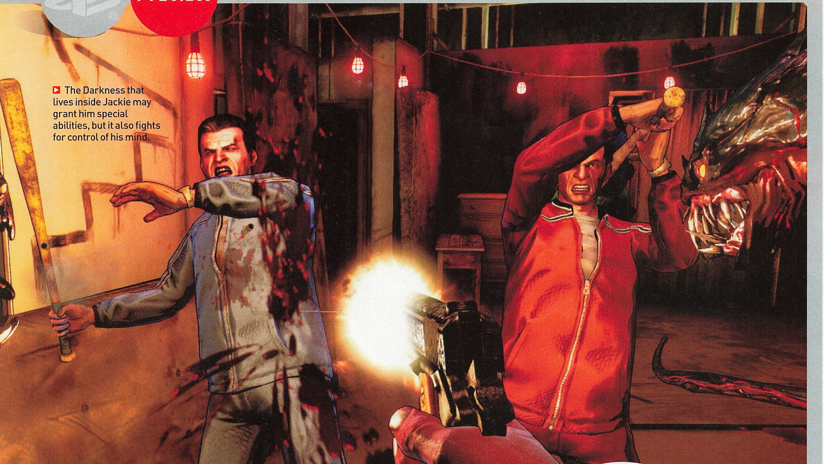
Mass Effect 3's co-op multiplayer places a huge emphasis on teamwork.



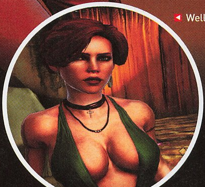


Though we didn't encounter morality meters or dialogue trees in multiplayer, narrative threads do exist.

We can choose which race to play, though each is limited to specific classes.



The Darkness that lives inside Jackie may grant him special abilities, but it also fights for control of his mind.



Well, hello...

Format **PS3** ETA **February 2012** Pub **2K Games** Dev **Digital Extremes**

The Darkness II

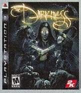
The battle between light and dark just got literal

Dual-wielding? Pfft, child's play. *The Darkness II* plans to up the ante with its aptly named "quad-wielding." Beyond the usual assortment of firearms, mafia boss Jackie Estacado also wields a pair of demonic arms that can grab, slash, and dismantle both enemies and the environment. Each appendage is mapped to a specific shoulder button, allowing the simultaneous use of each weapon.

While Jackie's black tendrils gripped a car door like a shield, we could charge into danger with a pistol firing from each hand. As his arms slammed a rival goon into the ground, we could pump our victim's hapless body full of holes as it bounced back into the air. With each creative combination of Jackie's powers, we earned more "essence" points—similar to the *Bulletstorm's* Killshot system. But these points can be used to unlock cooler, more elaborate powers: a ground-pound that explodes enemies, a "demonic lift" that suspends them in air, a berserker mode in which Jackie moves faster and never has to reload.

As if that didn't make him powerful enough, he'll still be able to conjure little creatures called Darklings that can perform tasks like climbing through vents to unlock a door. None of this really makes Jackie's life easy, though. A gang called the Brotherhood has weaponized light (which saps Jackie's life and powers) and will use it to try to steal the Darkness from him—while the Darkness itself tries to manipulate him using the memory of his dead girlfriend...who may be alive after all. **SCOTT BUTTERWORTH**

Can't Wait? Play this



The Darkness

(PS3, 2007)
Way back in 2007, we said: "*The Darkness* is brutal in its violence, language, and dark tone." That still sounds good to us.
VERDICT: 9

FARIN
Champion of Erebor
MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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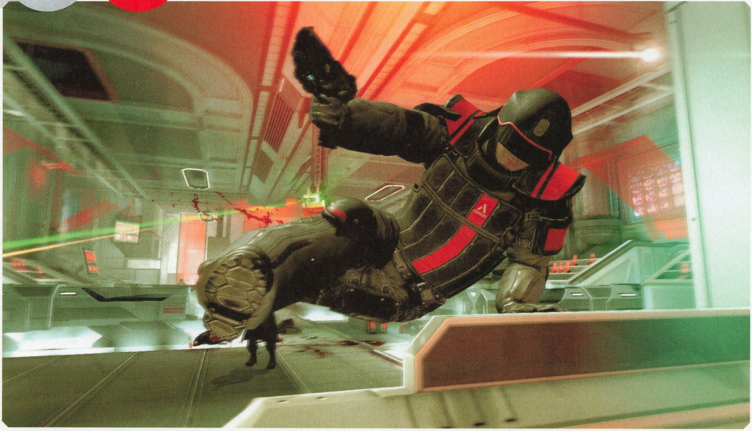


HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February 2012** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Starbreeze Studios**

Syndicate

A chip off the old block

Let's see...a dystopian future in which humans voluntary receive neural implants to improve their quality of life—sound familiar? Sure, next year's *Syndicate* reboot may *slightly* resemble *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, but what lies under the hood is an entirely different beast.

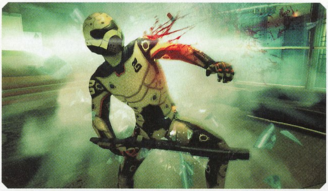
Syndicate is all about fast-paced, brutal action. Protagonist Miles Kilo, an agent for one of the mega-corporations (known as Syndicates) vying for consumer control, has little use for stealth. All he cares about is gunning down his rivals and, on occasion, frying their brains. That's right: Kilo can hack into the neural implants of his enemies to turn them against one another with the help of his special DART 6 bio-chip.

Using the game's on-the-fly hacking interface (no minigames here), we were able to persuade a hostile guard to mow down his friends. In another scenario, we used the Suicide hack on an unsuspecting victim, causing him to blow himself up (and those nearby) with his own grenade. In hairy situations, we could activate the DART chip itself, speeding up our reaction time and creating a slow-mo effect akin to bullet-time. The best part? Take down enough soldiers and we're allowed to purchase new hacking abilities and skill upgrades.

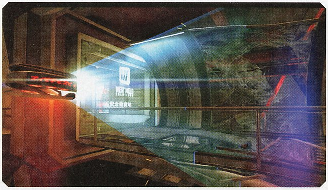
Syndicate's shaping up to be a top-notch shooter—and despite its departure from its isometric roots, it still offers plenty of run-and-gun tactics and strategy.

RYAN TALJONICK

▲ Kilo's DART chip allows him to see the digital signatures of his enemies through walls.



▲ Dan the security guard might have seen this coming if he hadn't been playing around on his fancy new cell phone.



▲ *Syndicate* offers a glimpse into a dark, consumer-driven world ruled by mega-corporations.

ANDRIEL
Loremaster of Rivendell
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

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HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **EA Canada**

SSX

Getting frosty with friends

On top of *SSX's* Global Events online multiplayer mode—which sees us taking on around-the-world competitors in real-time trick, race, and survival challenges—a couple of fresh features aim to wage all-out bragging rights wars in this adrenaline-spiking snowboarding reboot. Explore mode tallies our race times and trick scores, but tweaks the traditional stat-tracking with player ghosts; we actually see apparitions of friends tricking and racing while exploring *SSX's* environments. This not only allows us to compete with buddies who aren't even signed in, but it also lets us learn from their gnarly wipeouts—or get schooled by their mad skills.

While this addition makes the competition more spirited, Geotags make it slightly more sinister. Represented by glowing icons, these items are placed by players within the environment, acting as baiting dares. If we land an especially dangerous jump, pull off a near-impossible trick, or literally go out on a limb to cheat death, we'll want to place a Geotag. Serving as both status symbols and currency earners, they collect coin until they expire or another rider scoops them up; the former sees the tag-placer getting cash to spend on upgrades, while the latter puts the prize in the parka pocket of whoever's good, brave, or stupid enough to steal it from its precarious perch. **MATT CABRAL**

The always lovely Elise Riggs makes a welcome return in the *SSX* reboot.

Got what it takes to be a *SSX* champion? Compete in online Global Events and prove it.

Each of the game's regions are modeled after real-world locations using topographical data from NASA.

We like to call this the "please don't let me die" trick. So far, we've had a 100 percent success rate.

ERADAN
Ranger of the North
MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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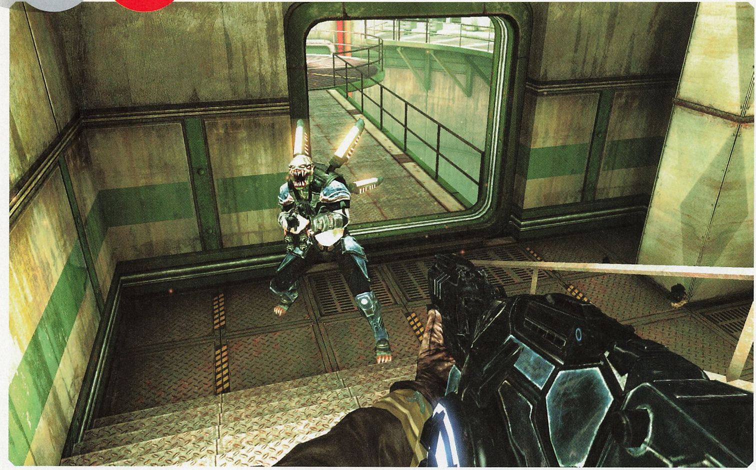


HANDS-ON Format **PS Vita** ETA **Q1 2012** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Nihilistic Software**

Resistance
Burning Skies

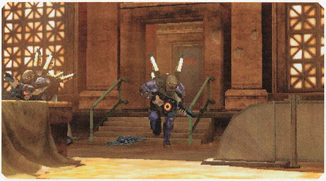
Fighting the fire with fire

Any doubts we had about first-person shooters on a portable device were instantly laid to rest during our hands-on demo of *Resistance: Burning Skies*. The Vita's dual-analog shooting controls immediately felt familiar, and we were able to jump right into slaying alien scum.

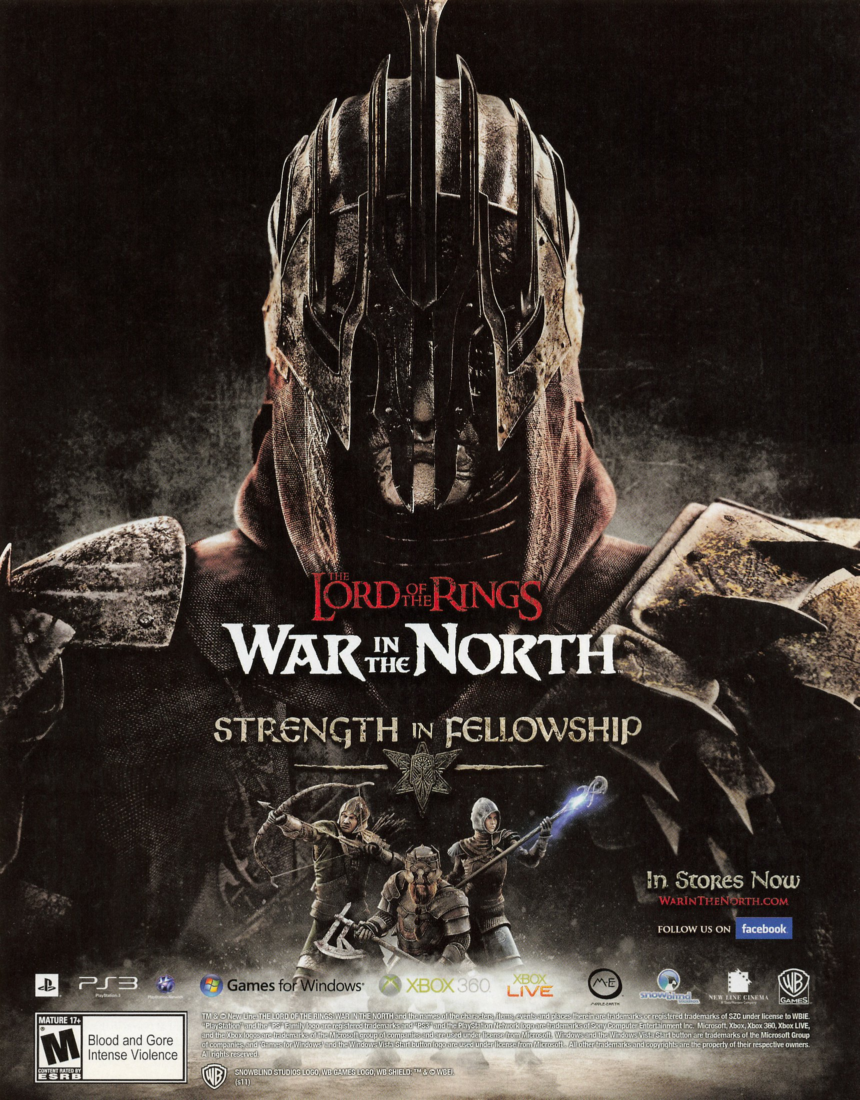
Set in 1950s New York City, *Burning Skies* lets us experience the Chimera's initial invasion of the East Coast through the eyes of Tom Riley, a civilian firefighter forced into action. Naturally, Riley comes equipped with a large fire axe perfect for cleaving Chimera into pieces, and he'll obtain some shiny new toys during his journey. The on-screen grenade icon can be dragged and dropped to toss a frag with surprising accuracy, and Riley can activate the secondary firing mode of his guns via touchscreen. After tapping hostiles to lock on to them, we used the new Cluster Fire Gun's homing rocket secondary explode them to bits. It took us a few minutes to grow accustomed to the touch controls, but we were hooked once we got the hang of it.

Burning Skies may be a portable title, but don't be fooled—it looks and plays just as good as its console cousins. **RYAN TALJONICK**

▲ *Burning Skies* introduces a great new cover mechanic ideal for huge firefights with Chimeran forces.



▲ The well-done lighting effects and stunning visuals made us forget we were playing a portable game.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WB GAMES
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

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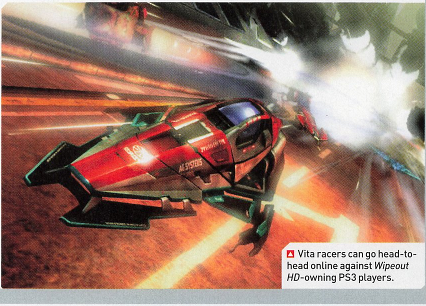
(s11)

HANDS-ON Format **PS Vita** ETA **2012** Pub **SCEA** Dev **SCE Studio Liverpool**

Wipeout 2048

Blast from the pass

Set to be the most futuristic version of Sony's most futuristic racer, *Wipeout 2048* is actually set in the "past." It's a prequel to the original 1995 PSone game, which took place in the year 2052—but that's not what makes it futuristic. Besides two familiar control setups there's a new motion setting; twist the Vita to turn, accelerate with the rear touch panel, and fire weapons by tapping the screen. Meanwhile, multiplayer tailors challenges to skill level: a newcomer may be tasked with simply not finishing last, while a stronger player may have to take out the leader. JAMES COATES



▲ Vita racers can go head-to-head online against *Wipeout HD*-owning PS3 players.

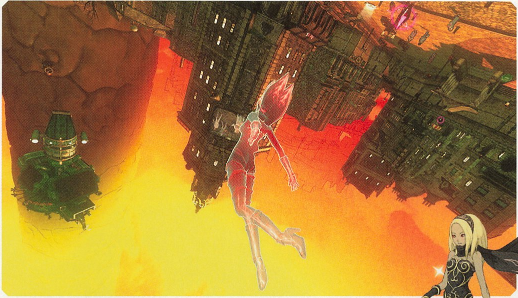
HANDS-ON Format **PSN** ETA **Q1 2012** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Klei Ent.**

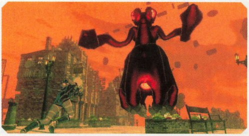
Shank 2

Shiv and let die

Sporting exaggerated violence, lightning-quick combat, and a slick graphic novel-inspired presentation, *Shank* proved that there's still a craving for sidescrolling brawlers. While retaining its predecessor's eye-popping, thumb-blistering elements, *Shank 2* refines the core gameplay and adds a live-as-long-as-you-can survival mode.

Anyone who force fed grenades to *Shank's* henchmen should feel right at home in this entrails-spilling sequel. As the titular blade-baring badass,





These towering monstrosities can only be defeated by attacking their exposed, glowing cores.

HANDS-ON Format **PS Vita** ETA **2012** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Sony Japan Studios**

Gravity Rush

An upside-down night on the town

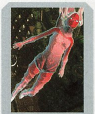
We've always cursed our inability to walk on walls and ceilings—until we played *Gravity Rush*. This gorgeously detailed game pops with vibrant cel-shaded visuals and revolves around an interesting core mechanic: gravity manipulation.

See, our heroine Kat has amnesia; she can't quite recall how or why she woke up in the strange city she now resides in. All she knows is this city is being torn apart by unnatural creatures, and, for some reason, she's mysteriously gained the ability to control the gravity around her.

With the press of the Right-shoulder button, Kat enters a free-floating state. Here, we can aim a cursor at a variety of surfaces using Vita's dual-analog sticks or with its movement-sensing gyros. Pressing the shoulder button a second time launches her at blistering speeds toward the selected location, allowing us to walk on previously inaccessible areas, like walls and ceilings.

The gravity mechanic plays an important role in the game, as Kat must use her newfound powers to solve the mystery of her past and confront the hostile entities invading her world.

During a gravity launch, Kat must kick the exposed cores of her foes. Victory rewards us with health and gravity meter refills, as well as experience points for evolving her techniques. *Gravity Rush* might seem a bit unusual, but it's rapidly becoming one of our most anticipated Vita titles. RYAN TALJONICK



Nice Moves

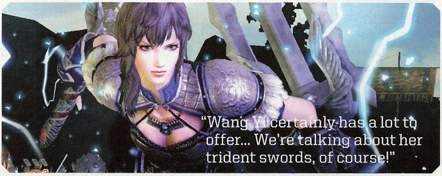
Gravity Rush makes good use of PS Vita's motion and touch capabilities. Kat can dodge enemy attacks with a quick swipe of the touchscreen, and aiming the gravity cursor with Vita's gyros is quick and accurate.

we're again given on-the-fly access to a brimming bullets-and-blades arsenal. On top of rearranging ribcages with buckshot and machetes, *Shank 2* introduces a new counter mechanic; triggered with R2 when an exclamation point appears above foes, it finishes them in an especially Mature-rated fashion—doing dental work on a big brute with his own shovel is a highlight. Furthermore, increased environmental interactions, including explosive barrels promise a ratcheting body count.

While the campaign—which sees Shank returning home to find it under attack—yields familiar but tweaked ways to fill body bags, the local and online co-op mode is brand new. *Shank 2* pits two of us against increasingly difficult waves of crazies. If that's not bad enough, we also need to defend supply stations from C4-strapped psychopaths and take on muscle-bound bosses. We can't wait to dig out our rusty prison blade. MATT CABRAL

Character Crush

Dynasty Warriors 7: Xtreme Legends (Tecmo Koei)



"Wang Yi certainly has a lot to offer... We're talking about her trident swords, of course!"

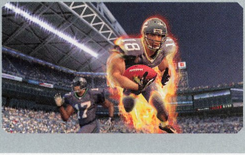
The latest on...

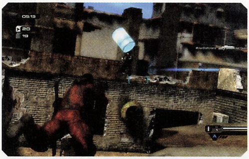
New shots, new games, new info

NFL Blitz

Format **PSN** ETA **January** Pub **EA Sports** Dev **Tiburon**

Thirty-yard first downs, no penalties, tackles that look like wrestling moves, and a playbook that consists almost entirely of sensational Hail Mary-style plays? It must be *NFL Blitz*, the original over-the-top arcade football experience. While not a port per se, the new downloadable version maintains the original's unique brand of twitchy, seven-on-seven smashmouth action while adding every game mode imaginable. Throw in some hilarious cheats, wacky secret characters, and the official NFL license and we've got a historically fun multiplayer experience in the making.





Inversion

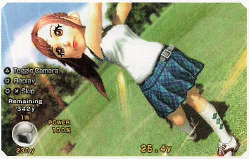
Format **PS3** ETA **February** Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **Saber Int.**

Inversion gives the laws of physics the middle finger in ways we've only dreamed about. We use gravity to our advantage as we fight our way through an invasion in this long awaited third-person shooter.

I am Alive

Format **PSN** ETA **2012** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Ubisoft Shanghai**

Once slated as a PS3 SKU but finally arriving as a PSN game, *I am Alive* follows a survivor as he searches for his family in a world destroyed by a catastrophe known only as the "Event." Gather supplies and endure bandits to survive.



Hot Shots Golf 6

Format **PS Vita** ETA **2012** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Clap Hanz**

Included in Vita's projected launch lineup is the latest *Hot Shots Golf*, one of PlayStation's most reliable titles. Making use of the augmented reality and the touchscreens, *Hot Shots Golf* promises to be a fun sports addition.

Little Deviants

Format **PS Vita** ETA **2012** Pub **SCEA** Dev **BigBig Studios**

Made up entirely of minigames, *Little Deviants* uses each game to show off a different aspect of the Vita hardware's capabilities, including pinching and pulling the rear touchpad to roll the Deviants around obstacles on the screen and using its cameras to target enemies.

Trine 2

Format **PSN** ETA **Q4** Pub **Atlus USA** Dev **Frozenbyte**

Online multiplayer co-op was notably absent in the first *Trine* title, but this time around the platformer will account for the addition of friends. More challenging puzzles are also on the slate and should provide us with a bigger incentive to group up.

Hakuoki: Demon of the Fleeting Blossom

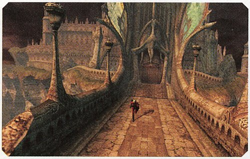
Format **PSP** ETA **February** Pub **Aksys** Dev **Idea Factory**

Dating sims usual feature sexy ladies, but *Hakuoki* is a dating sim/adventure game directed toward a female audience, with the emphasis on pretty boys and bloody action.

Corpse Party

Format **PSP** ETA **Q4** Pub **XSEED Games** Dev **Team GrisGris**

Though it sounds like it should be a zombie rhythm game, *Corpse Party* is an RPG puzzler with a grisly story. We explore the halls of Heavenly Host Elementary and try to discover why it can't keep its students alive.



Devil May Cry HD Collection

Format **PS3** ETA **2012** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Capcom**

The first three *Devil May Cry* games are ready for their HD upgrade. *Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening* will be a special edition in the collection, and will include new modes and Vergil as a playable character.

Yakuza: Dead Souls

Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **Sega** Dev **Sega**

Originally called *Yakuza of the End*, *Yakuza: Dead Souls'* U.S. release is now confirmed. Just when we thought we were done with zombie games, they pull us back in to deal with an undead infestation gangsta style.

Gut Reaction

The awesome and the awful

▲Level Up

Portal 2's newest DLC will include a level editor—just a little something for crafty GLaDOS-esque fans.

▲Saving a Fortune

Uncharted 3's Fortune Hunter's Club promises much-beloved discounts on future DLC.

▲Late Valentine

The Vita's release date is set for February 22, 2012. So close, yet so far.

▼Game On

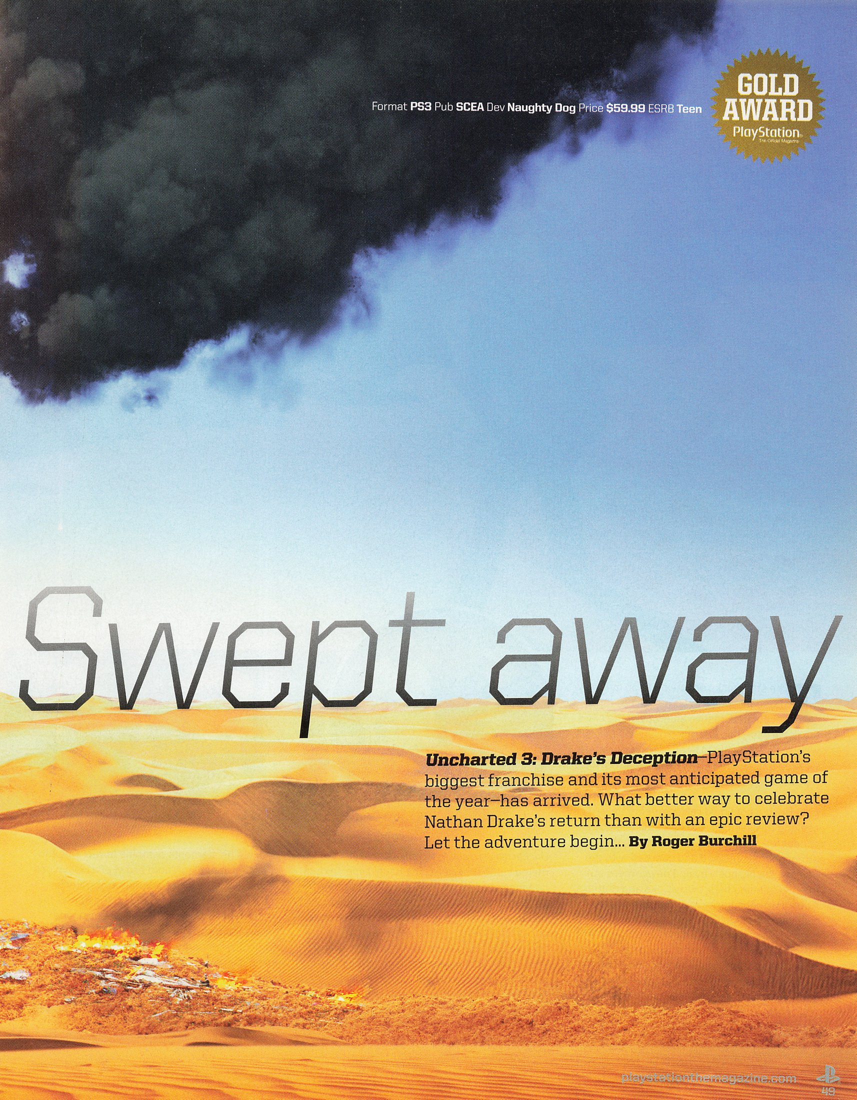
Sony's "Long Live Play" commercial was a moving tribute to PlayStation gamers. Too bad some Twitter users didn't get it. #fail

▼Slim Pickins'

We still love PS2, that's why we're depressed there's only one new game launching for it this holiday season.

▼Battlefield Blues

Our excitement for Battlefield 3 was muted by a rather large day-one patch download. Boo!

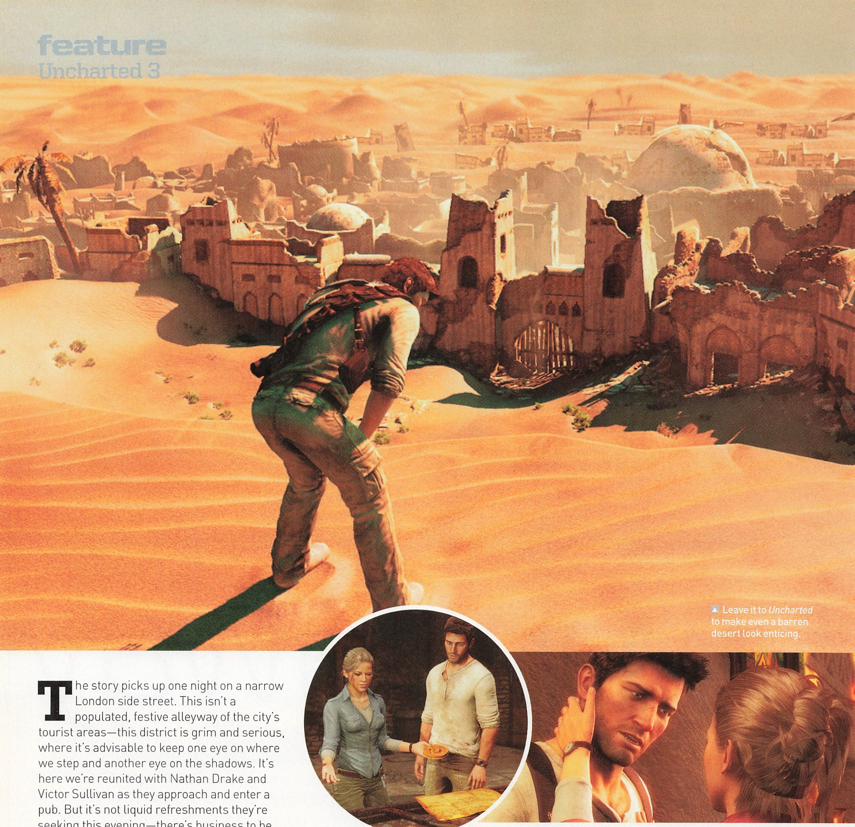


Format **PS3** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Naughty Dog** Price **$59.99** ESRB **Teen**

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Swept away

Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception—PlayStation's biggest franchise and its most anticipated game of the year—has arrived. What better way to celebrate Nathan Drake's return than with an epic review? Let the adventure begin... **By Roger Burchill**



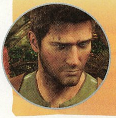
Leave it to *Uncharted* to make even a barren desert look enticing.

The story picks up one night on a narrow London side street. This isn't a populated, festive alleyway of the city's tourist areas—this district is grim and serious, where it's advisable to keep one eye on where we step and another eye on the shadows. It's here we're reunited with Nathan Drake and Victor Sullivan as they approach and enter a pub. But it's not liquid refreshments they're seeking this evening—there's business to be conducted. Inside the establishment, the atmosphere is hushed and guarded with the patrons suspiciously eyeing newcomers but intently minding their own drinks and matters. A word with the barkeep and Drake and Sullivan are led to upstairs to a private billiard room. Here, we meet a man namedTalbot and his entourage of thugs and strong arms. An exchange is attempted: Our hero presents Sir Francis Drake's ring for a briefcase filled with cash. But as so often happens in *Uncharted's* world, the deal goes sour and events become... confrontational in short order.

In the ensuing fracas, we're introduced to *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deceptions'* overhauled melee combat system. The usual repertoire of punches and kicks is now enhanced by *Batman*-style counterattacks and contextual takedowns. Objects in the environment—pool sticks and bottles in this instance—can be used to bash our enemies' heads, while a new shoving mechanic lets us manage the mob and free up space to continue the brawl. Precisely timed dodges maintain the rhythm and flow of the fight: A well-executed weave makes for a quicker dispatch of a foe, while a late avoidance results in additional abuse for Drake. The elements combine to recreate the choreographed barroom brawl of a Hollywood movie, but here we're actually embroiled in the action, shaping and guiding the flow of the melee where we once merely sat back and enjoyed. It's a wonderful and satisfying gameplay refinement that imparts the feel of being part of a living, breathing, ass-kicking action movie.

But this isn't how a blockbuster is supposed to begin. The *Uncharted* franchise is known for its cinematic set pieces and epic cliffhanger sequences. *Deception's*

▲ Familiar faces return, but the new additions shine just as brightly.



It's a wonderful and satisfying gameplay refinement that imparts the feel of being part of a living, breathing, ass-kicking action movie.

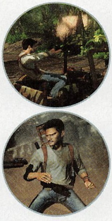
introduction, however, is all about mood and atmosphere and the subtle interactions that color the game. The real stars here are the layers-upon-layers of astute tweaks that permeate and elevate the entire experience. From the involving storyline and characters to the enthralling gameplay and controls to the sheer technical magnificence of its presentation, *Deception* serves notice from the get-go that the year's most-anticipated PlayStation game was worth the wait.

Deeper and Deeper

True to franchise form, *Deception* propels Nathan Drake on another legend-fueled multi-country quest. The lost city he seeks, Iram—also known as "the Atlantis of the Sands"—was located 400 years ago by Sir Francis Drake before being mysteriously sealed off, its precise location lost to history. But before Drake can rediscover Iram and unravel its secrets, he must travel from England to France, Syria, and Yemen while facing off against agents of an ancient power-hungry organization.

It's a tale and format that's reminiscent of an *Indiana Jones* film, but it's the deft storytelling—especially for a videogame—that's of particular note. The hard-hitting, fast-moving plot does an excellent job of mixing intriguing myth-delving historical bits with expected over-the-top hero action, yet there's a constant emotional examination of the game's characters and their relationship with one another. We get new insights into the background and basis of Drake and Sullivan's bond that examines them as friends and partners, mentor and disciple, and even as father-figure and son. So too with Drake and Elena Fisher's complicated relationship that waivers between shades of honest affection and bitter estrangement. We already know and like these characters, but *Deception's* most significant achievement is that through its storytelling, we finally begin to understand them.

Like this? Play these



Uncharted: Drake's Fortune

(PS3, 2007)
A 400-year-old clue in the coffin of Sir Francis Drake sets modern-day fortune hunter Nathan Drake in search of El Dorado, the fabled "Lost City of Gold." Accompanied by now familiar companions Victor Sullivan and Elena Fisher, the trail leads to a forgotten island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean where Drake must fight to survive against a ruthless band of mercenaries.
Verdict: 8

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

(PS3, 2009)
PTOM's 2009 Game of the Year winner finds Drake on a quest to locate Marco Polo's lost fleet. He soon realizes that Polo was attempting to find the mythical kingdom of Shambhala (Shangri-La) to recover the wish-fulfilling Cintamani stone. The massive sapphire could be worth billions, but a rogue paramilitary leader and his private army also seek the jewel.
Verdict: 10

GREATEST HITS
PS3
UNCHARTED
DUAL PACK

Uncharted Dual Pack

PS3 newcomers or those who've been stranded on a deserted island for the past four years should pick up the *Uncharted Dual Pack*. The $39.99 bundle includes both *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* and *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* Game of the Year Edition. The *Dual Pack* also includes bonus content and a voucher for a range of *Uncharted 2* and *3* DLC.

Improved hand-to-hand combat makes the experience even more cinematic.

It's important to dwell on *Deception's* substantive layers and meaningful nuance because it's a game that can overwhelm our senses with its visual grandeur. Viewed and played in its full 1080p glory, we were swept away by the dazzling spectacle of its set pieces. We'll only detail three of the exhilarating sequences here as Naughty Dog has already teased them in pre-release trailers, thus letting us avoid spoilers and a deluge of outraged reader letters.

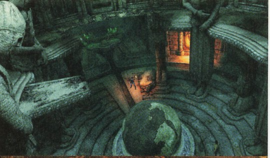
In one of Drake and Sully's early stops for clues to Iram's location, we visit the gorgeously detailed ruins of a French chateau. As we make our way into the decaying structure, we notice soft, glowing beams of sunlight peeking through gaps, illuminating the debris of past inhabitants and the flora that is reclaiming its territory. We take a moment to admire a butterfly as it flutters by. What subsequently transpires stands in stark contrast to this peaceful scene. The chateau bursts into flames after Kate Marlowe—*Deception's* new antogonist—sends her lackeys after Drake and Sully, and we experience the odd duality of desperately attempting to escape while being mesmerized by the fire and smoke's superbly realized lighting and particle effects.

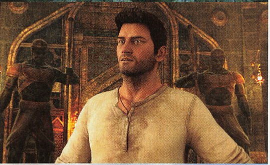
Much later, we find Drake in the Indian Ocean infiltrating the ship of the charismatic pirate Rameses. The sea is stormy and this time we're distracted by heaving waves and the salty spray that assaults us and washes over the ship's deck. We resort to stealthy takedowns of the crew and guards until an outright firefight is no longer avoidable. It's then we notice how the bobbing motion of the ship complicates our ability to aim—an amazingly simple but deliciously challenging gameplay wrinkle. When the confrontation ultimately escalates and causes the ship to capsize, there's a frantic, disoriented dash and climb through the bowels of the ship as the surging water threatens to consume us.

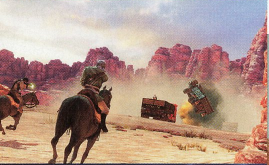
But perhaps most amazing of all is the desert airfield sequence that has Drake daringly pursue a departing cargo plane in order to launch and attach himself to its retracting landing gear. Once inside the aircraft, he's discovered by an adversary of gargantuan proportions and must battle for his life on the deployed cargo ramp while clinging precariously to the netting surrounding some purposely ejected freight. As exhilarating and memorable as the scene has played out to this point, it pales in comparison to the set piece's thrilling conclusion that propels Drake into *Deception's* final chapters. It's an episode of heart-pounding, adrenaline-pumping videogame excitement that we'll be talking about and reliving for years to come.

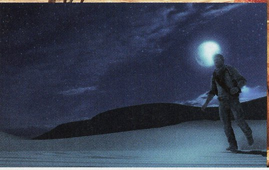
Misadventures

Actual gameplay-specific complaints in *Deception* are remarkably few. There's a delicate balance between crowd-pleasing









Rogues Gallery

Meet Nathan Drake's ruthless rivals

Kate Marlowe

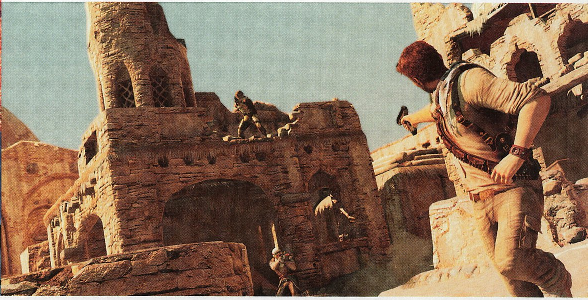
A cold and precise English woman who commands a powerful secret society, Kate Marlowe has links with Sully that stretch back to the con-man's first meeting with Drake—the beginning of the mystery this game gradually unravels.

Talbot

Marlowe's top lieutenant, Talbot is suave, ruthless, and eminently dislikeable. Talbot is also unnaturally nimble and makes more than one escape that seems impossible for any normal man. The perfect foil for Drake.

Rameses

A disarmingly jovial pirate also in the employ of Marlowe, Rameses is a smooth liar who weaves a string of fibs designed to force Drake into giving up Iram's location. The set-piece showdown on Rameses' capsizing ship is a game highlight.



▲ We feel bad blowing bullet holes in beautiful, ancient structures, but hey, they shot first. What else can we do, right?

> We experience the odd duality of desperately attempting to secure our escape and survival while being mesmerized by the fire and smoke's superbly realized lighting and particle effects.

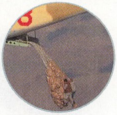
animations and unintended control inputs in any third-person action game, and while there were occasions in the game when we might accidently, for example, punch when we meant to dodge, the controls felt quite well sorted for the most part. Yes, there were illusion-puncturing moments when we'd awkwardly inch our way to a ledge or repeatedly hop for a non-existent handhold, but we'd quickly forgive and forget when we noticed subtle touches like Drake nonchalantly glancing at some random object on the ground as he walked by.

But it's during the high-energy foot pursuits that we encounter what constitutes the game's biggest flaw. Discern the proper path during these chases and the sequences become one of the game's highlights, but that's easier said than done at times and an inopportune stumble or inadvertent turn leads to our immediate capture or death. A quick reboot and we were back in the action, but there were occasions when we'd falter several times in the same segment, transforming what should have been a thrilling and seamless event into a studdering series of replays. We wish the devs could have found a way to incorporate some manner of second-chance mechanic to minimize these flow-robbing instances.

Deja View Movie inspirations for Uncharted 3's epic set pieces

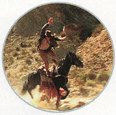
The Poseidon Adventure (1972)

There's something familiar about Drake's disorienting encounter with a capsized ship.



The Living Daylights (1987)

A desperate fight and hanging out the back of a cargo plane? Sounds like James Bond to us.

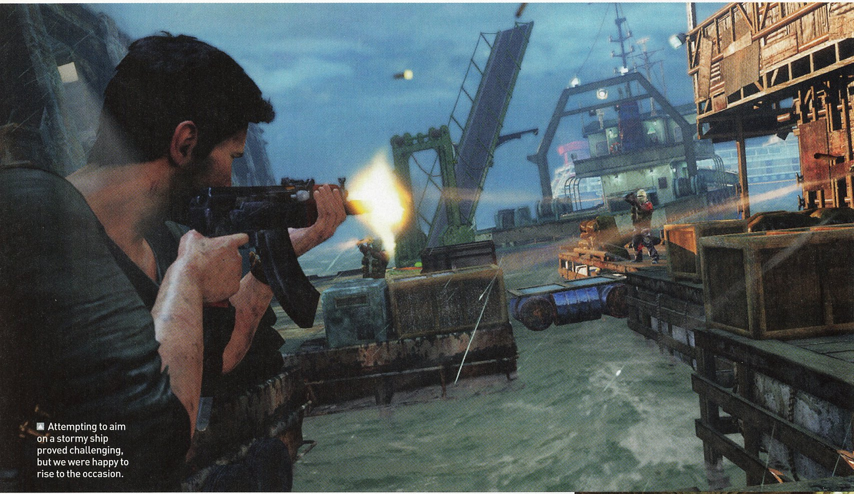


Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1989)

A horsebound convoy chase through the desert. Yep.

Casino Royale (2006)

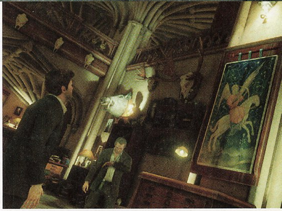
Both Drake and Bond must be parkour enthusiasts given their proclivity for rooftop chases and breathtaking leaps.



Attempting to aim on a stormy ship proved challenging, but we were happy to rise to the occasion.

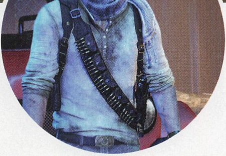
Special note should be made of *Deception's* exceptional voice acting and dialogue. It's an aspect of the franchise that has always been well done, but there's a new level of mature execution evident here. It's as if actors Nolan North, Richard McGonagle, and crew have become intimately familiar and comfortable with their characters. There's an unprecedented level of familiarity and authenticity in their exchanges: the heartfelt moments always seem sincere, the inside jokes never fall flat, and the genuine affection between old friends comes resoundingly through.

These characters have become such an integral part of our gaming lives it's somewhat of a shame when *Deception's* campaign ends in approximately 10 hours. It is perhaps amongst the 10 best hours in gaming, but it seems cruelly short when we would like nothing more than to linger further with Drake, Sully, Elena, and Chloe...especially Chloe. Is it wrong of us to grouse that one of gaming's most intriguing and alluring females is relegated to a bit role in *Deception*, and essentially disappears altogether two-thirds of the way through the game? Come now, Naughty Dog, Ms. Frazer deserves better than that!



Here we admire Drake's amazing graphics as Drake admires a work of art. Pretty meta.

C5
NO SMOKING



> This is the rich, inviting fantasy adventure of every *Indiana Jones* movie fused and transformed into our own digital playground.

Adventure On

While the single-player adventure ends too soon for our tastes, *Deception* also features one of the best multiplayer experiences on PS3. The standard elements make their appearance here with Team Deathmatch, Free For All deathmatch, and a capture the flag variant called Plunder, but Three Team Deathmatch (three teams of two) and Team Objective (with its five tiered task-based competition) offer nice wrinkles to the formula. We also appreciate Hardcore matches—which eliminate boosters, kickbacks, and medal upgrades—and Co-op Hunter Arena, where we can join with a friend to face off against the world. Factor in the scalable environments, the cinematic takedowns, and the 11 exquisitely detailed maps and it's not hard to imagine us having to start re-planning our online schedule beyond mainstays like *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield*.

And as if that's not enough to satiate our *Uncharted* appetite, the Spec Ops-like co-op game mode offers a series of story-based challenges that can be faced with a friend online or via splitscreen. Unique treasures can be found and multiplayer bonuses unlocked here, but a fan-service encounter with *Uncharted 2* villain Zoran Lazarevi stands out as an especially delightful treat. After all, we can't get enough of killing that particular SOB. Other episodes included a jaunt through the London Underground and a shootout in a monastery. Both the multiplayer and co-op action offer quality extensions of *Uncharted's* experience, and we hope there are frequent and generous helpings of DLC to keep the adventure rolling.

Move Over, Indy

Viewed strictly as a videogame, *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* represents the height of technical achievement—the state-of-the-art, if you will—for the interactive console experience. Nothing else out there looks better or manages to create such an enticingly detailed world. This is the rich, inviting fantasy adventure of every *Indiana Jones* movie fused and transformed into our own digital playground. This is the game that offers a true high-definition gaming experience that suddenly makes every competitor running at a mere 720p appear middling and aged. This is the PS3 exclusive we'll show off to our Xbox friends and wryly ask, "Do you have anything that compares to *that*?" And there will be no response.

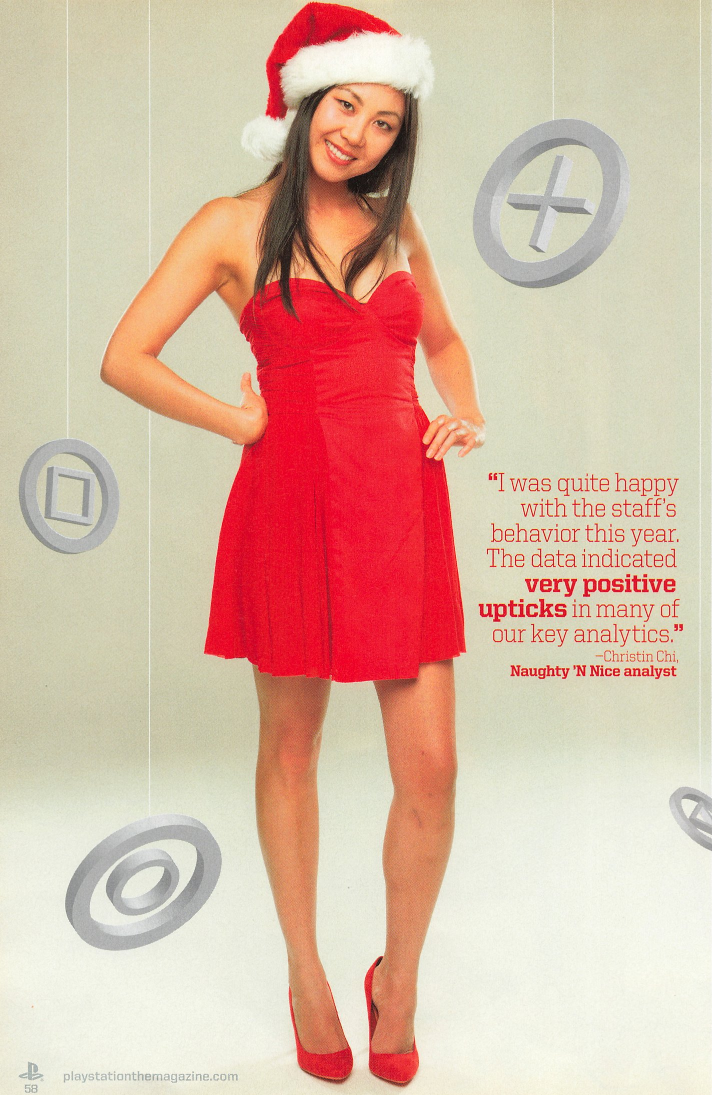
But perhaps *Deception's* greatest achievement is that it has taken the familiar and created a narrative with an identity and voice all its own. We no longer look at Nathan Drake and think "Indy knockoff" anymore: Drake's travails and struggles have been given history and depth. Suddenly, the cardboard cutout action has been infused with humanity; we want to learn more of the man and his motivations, we want to envelop ourselves in his friendships and loves, we actually *care* about Drake. The *Uncharted* franchise has taken on a life of its own, and we can't wait to see what happens next.

naughty 'N NICE

It's the night before Christmas... and visions of this year's PTOM Naughty 'N Nice report dance in Ryan's head. While he dreams of holidays past, and the presents in his future, Santa's helper and crack analyst Christin Chi double checks the complex calculations that compose each staffer's Naughty 'N Nice rating. Who's been good and who's been griefing in online multiplayer? **She knows that gifts hang in the balance.**

Photography by Mark Madeo

The Complete Catalog for 2011
naughty N NICE
CONFIDENTIAL DATA
For Use By Authorized Person
Softbox



“I was quite happy with the staff’s behavior this year. The data indicated very positive upticks in many of our key analytics.”

—Christin Chi,
Naughty ’N Nice analyst

Anne’s Incredibly Scroogy Gift Memory

“Unlike my compatriots, I never got cool game-related gifts because my parents told me games were ‘a waste of time’ and ‘would never be useful to me in any way.’ Well look at me now, Mom and Dad! I play games every day, and that’s *still* all I want for Christmas. I’m grateful for all the well-intended socks, but a new controller would have been way more useful. Maybe this year they’ll hear my pleas and get me something off my wish list. But I guess I could use some more socks too. You can never have too many socks.”

▶ **Gamedar Omega Shirt**
$15 | gamedar.com
“Although I love games, I don’t always want to wear something that screams GAMES! When it comes to fashion, tastefully less can be so much more.”

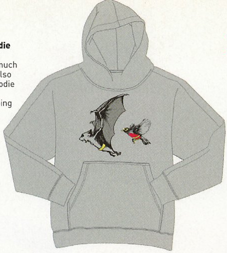
Ryan’s Fondest “It’s the thought that counts” Memory

“When the PlayStation 2 launched, I couldn’t wait to get my mitts on one. I recall frequenting my local videogame retailer and playing through the *Devil May Cry* demo over and over, wishing I had a PS2 of my own. Then, one fateful Christmas, my dreams came true. I opened a suspiciously large box filled with packaging peanuts, and found my PS2 at the bottom. The kicker? My parents forgot to buy a game for it! I was a little bummed, sure—but I finally had my dream machine to keep me company.”

DO NOT CROSS
POLICE LINE

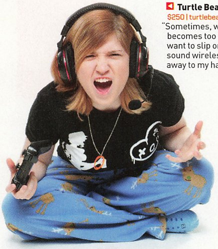
Canvas Utility Bag
$50 | thinkgeek.com
"I'm currently stuck hauling my junk around in a purse, but what I could really use is a utility bag I can fit my laptop, PSP, and miscellaneous accouterments in."

Bat and Robin Hoodie
$35 | snorgtees.com
"I like Batman just as much as the next girl, but I also like wordplay. This hoodie lets me show off how clever I am while keeping me warm and looking like a boss."



MASS EFFECT
RETRIBUTION
DREW KARPYSHYN

Mass Effect Novels
$8 | drewkarpyshyn.com
"I love the *Mass Effect* universe so it makes sense that I'd want to learn more by checking out the novels. There are three so far, with a fourth on the way."



Turtle Beach Ear Force PX5
$250 | turtlebeach.com
"Sometimes, when the world just becomes too much to bear, I just want to slip on a Dolby 7.1 surround sound wireless headset and drift away to my happy place."

Portal Friendship Necklaces
$20 | licketycut.com
"I don't have many friends, but the few I have deserve presents. With these *Portal* necklaces, people will always know who my besties are."

Game Central Tall Organizer
$65 | nulime.com
"My house is a disaster so I need organizational help. This unit has hooks for controllers and will keep my games off the floor."

Butterfly Knife-styled Pen
$10 | thinkgeek.com
"I like doing things that make others think I'm cool. Idly twirling a butterfly knife works, and with this pen I can do that without stabbing myself."

Anne's Essentials

GAME
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron

BLU-RAY
Pulp Fiction

SOCK FILLER
Plush Microbes
thinkgeek.com

Timbuk2 Command Messenger Bag
$110 | timbuk2.com
"I often travel the world to fight crime, so I appreciate a sturdy travel bag. Timbuk2's customizable, hand-crafted options never let me down."

Mad Catz Street Fighter X Tekken FightStick Pro
$160 | store.gameshark.com/SFxTekken
"If you're serious about fighting games, you need serious hardware. The FightStick Pro features arcade-quality components sourced from renowned Japanese manufacturer Sanwa Denshi."

CUBICLE WARFARE
101 OFFICE TRAPS AND PRANKS

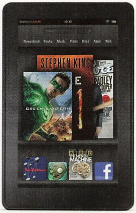
Cubicle Warfare
$15 | johnaustinbooks.com
"I'm a big fan of office pranks, but encasing personal effects in Jell-O is so 2008. With *Cubicle Warfare's* 101 pranks, I can finally become the ultimate office warrior."

Ryan's Essentials

GAME
Dark Souls

BLU-RAY
It's Kind of a Funny Story

SOCK FILLER
Lightsaber Bottle Opener
thinkgeek.com



Kindle Fire
$199 | amazon.com
"This inexpensive tablet is perfect for reading eBooks, browsing the Web, and streaming movies and TV shows. Count me in."

God of War Action Figures
$20 | thinkgeek.com
"Know what's more badass than Kratos? A 5.5-inch plastic replica of Kratos chillin' on my desk. I just hope he gets along with the rest of my action figures..."

SoundDock Series II Digital Music System
$300 | bose.com
"Sometimes I like to blare my favorite songs right from my iPod. Nothing beats the portability and quality of a Bose SoundDock."

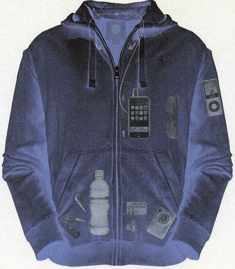
Roger's Defining Moment Memory

"My happiest holiday memory came during a Christmas shopping excursion. I'd reached an age when my parents no longer worried about surprising me with a gift, and when they saw me looking longingly at an Atari 2600 console, the decision was simple. My hands were literally shaking with excitement as I walked out of the store clutching my first game system ($150 was big money for my family in those days and I didn't think I had a shot of getting my own 2600). Looking back now, I realize it was a moment that shaped my destiny—and the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

> "But sometimes you just have to say **the hell with the data** and throw someone a curveball. There always needs to be one guy who gets the **lump of coal**."

Scott's Fuzziest Game Gift Memory

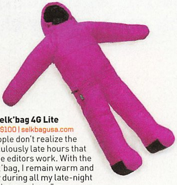
"When I first got my hands on the original *Metal Gear Solid*, I immediately fell in love. I must have beaten it a half-dozen times. Apparently my parents took notice because they somehow conjured up an imported Japanese copy of the game as a gift that year. Needless to say, I was floored. It didn't even matter that I had no way of actually playing the game. Just owning a Japanese copy felt undeniably special—like tracking down the first edition of a novel. Plus, it meant my parents had actually been paying attention to my silly little obsession. It's a gift that still sits on my desk to this day."



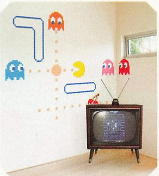
◀ SeV Ultimate Hoodie Microfleece
$70 | scottevest.com
"I carry a ridiculous amount of stuff with me at all times. That's no longer a problem with this gadget-swallowing hoodie from ScotteVest. Now, which of the 11 pockets shall I reserve for my PS Vita?"

▶ PlayStation 3D Display
$500 | playstation.com
"Big screen TVs are nice, but I actually play better sitting in front of this 24-inch display. The SimulView feature that delivers individual view perspectives through the 3D glasses during two-player gaming is mind-blowing."

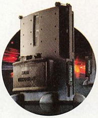
▲ Sumo Sway Bean Bag Chair
$250–$280 | sumolounge.com
"Standard bean bag chairs are too formless for optimum gaming. The Sway has a built-in back support that offers perfect game-playing ergonomics with traditional bean bag comfort."



▶ Selk'bag 4G Lite
$80–$100 | selkbagusa.com
"People don't realize the ridiculously late hours that game editors work. With the Selk'bag, I remain warm and cozy during all my late-night gaming sessions."



◀ PAC-MAN Ghost Wall Decals
$45 | whatisblik.com
"Need a little something to spruce up the ol' game cave? These retro wall decals from Blik provide just the right amount of old-school cool."



▶ Calibur11 Battlefield 3 Vault
$90 | calibur11.com
"Skins somehow seem passé when I can make my PS3 look like a Claymore mine. BOOM!"

Roger's Essentials

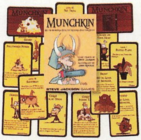
GAME
Ico & Shadow of the Colossus Collection

BLU-RAY
Scarface: Limited Edition

SOCK FILLER
Sound Disk Beanie
aerial7.com

◀ NERF Vortex Series
$10–$45 | hasbro.com/nerf
"Gamers will never be too old for NERF guns. Never. When I pick up one of the slick new disc-shooting Vortex guns, I instantly feel like a kid again. You will too."

▶ Munchkin
$25 | worldofmunchkin.com
"Miss local multiplayer as much as I do? Pick up this quirky, Dungeons & Dragons-esque card game! It's an excellent excuse for an evening of good-natured yelling."

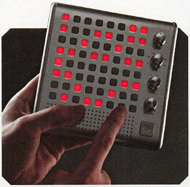


Scott's Essentials

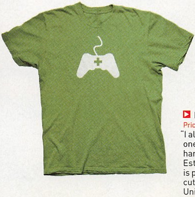
GAME
Portal 2

BLU-RAY
Apocalypse Now!

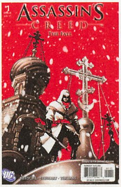
SOCK FILLER
Mimobot Flash Drive
mimoco.com



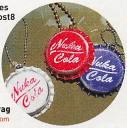
▲ Bliptronic 5000 LED Synthesizer
$50 | thinkgeek.com
"Part puzzle game, part musical instrument, this magical robot turns light patterns into 8-bit tones. Perfect for gamer/musician hybrids like me."



▼ Child's Play Charity T-shirt
$18 | childsplaycharity.org
"'Tis better to give than to receive, right? Donate to Child's Play."



◀ Assassin's Creed: The Fall
$5 per comic | store.ubiworksshop.com
"A sucker for *Assassin's Creed* and engrossing stories, this three-book series fit me perfectly. Got a favorite game franchise? Chances are an Amazon search will turn up a comic series."



***Fallout* necklaces by Outpost8**

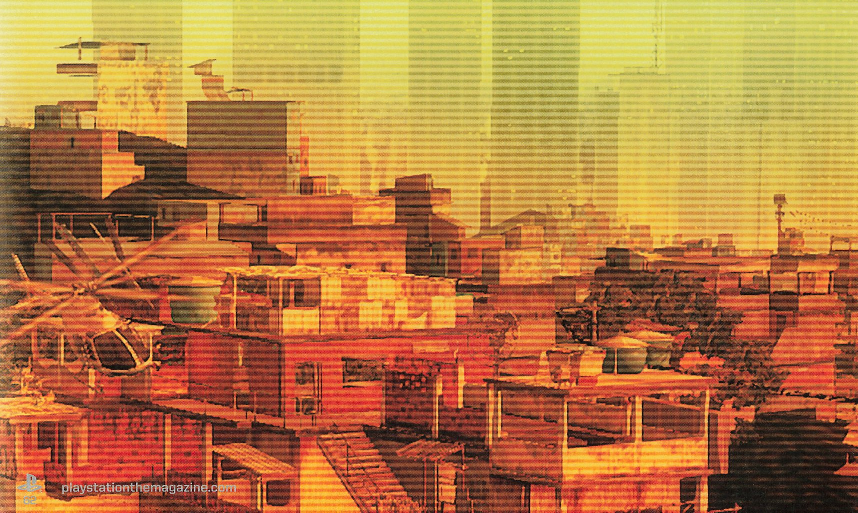
▶ DIY game swag
Prices vary | etsy.com
"I always love one-of-a-kind, handmade gifts, and Esty's Geekery category is packed with tons of cutesy game crafts. Unique and creative!"

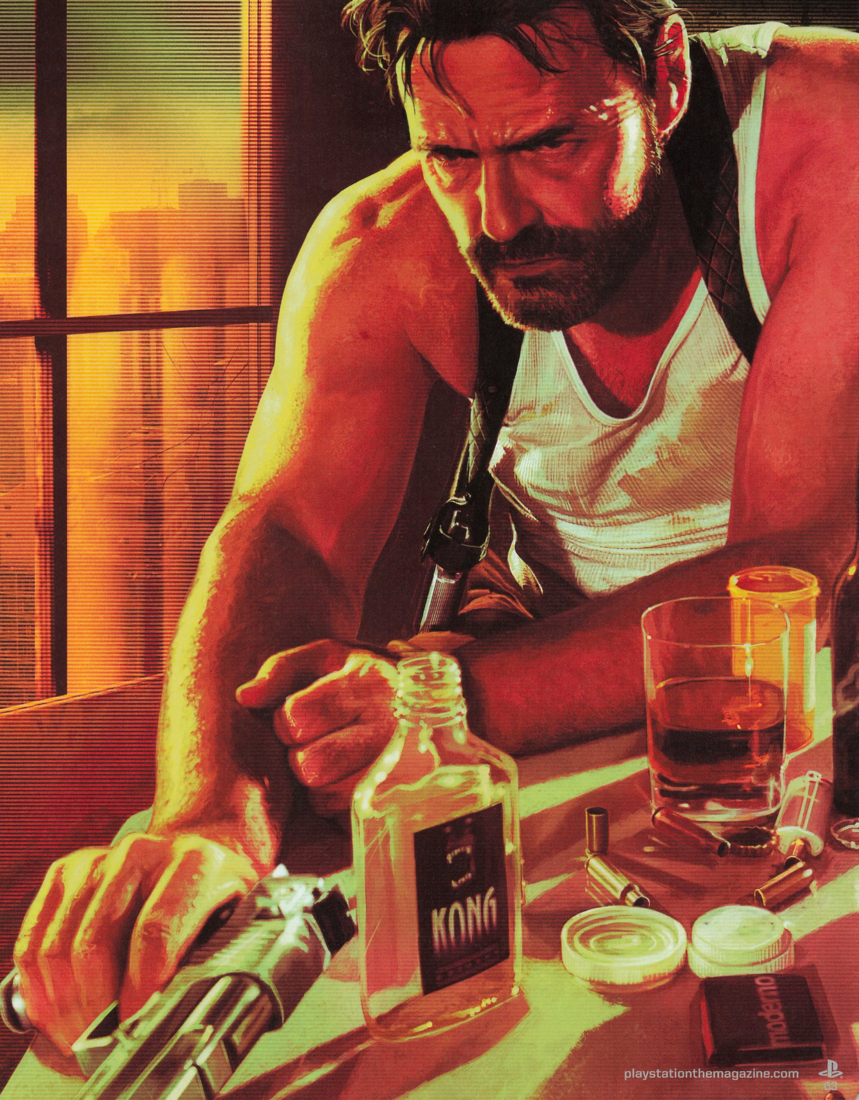
MAX PAYNE 3

Rockstar's hardboiled detective returns and brings all the fury of New York with him. From bullet time to happy hour, Max is back and better than ever.

by Scott Butterworth

Format **PS3** ETA **March 2012** Pub **Rockstar Games** Dev **Rockstar Vancouver**




KONG
moderno

From exploding gas tanks to shattering windows, every instance of environmental destruction looked spectacularly detailed.

Max Payne has the look of a man who's given up. His sallow, unshaven face weighs heavily with the regret he's long since stopped hiding.

His cheap tie, creased and worn, hangs like a noose about his neck, glowing pale red in the neon light that floods his squalid New York apartment. Empty bottles litter the floor beneath the peeling paint and haphazard news clippings that cling to the walls—signs of a life consumed by the sort of hard-earned nihilism born of bitter failures and haunting memories. It's a sad window into the soul of a ruined man. And we couldn't be happier about it.

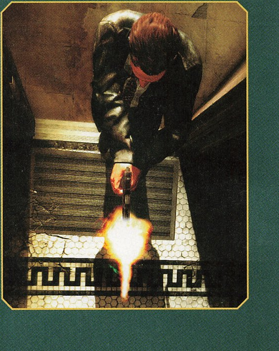
That may sound cruel, but really we're just relieved to find the same self-medicating, hardboiled detective we last saw in 2003's *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne*. Clearly the intervening eight years have not been kind to the man—who now seems more defeated and alone than ever—but seeing that same gritty noir spirit recaptured in the early portions of our extensive demo with Rockstar Games reassured us that this long overdue follow-up is poised to provide the same serious and surreal shooter experience the original *Payne* games pioneered on PS2.

KISS THE BOTTLE

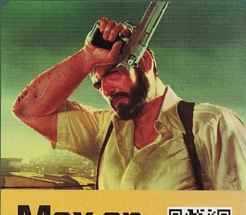
Though the game's earliest moments do feature Max's dingy New York digs, the bulk of *Max Payne 3* takes place in sunny São Paulo. Out of work and off the wagon, Max decides to take a private security gig protecting the wealthy Branco family in the dangerous and economically divided Brazilian city at the urging of a former NYPD colleague named Raul Passos (think *Man on Fire* minus the cute little girl). But before he can accept Passos' offer and ditch the Big Apple, a bereaved mob boss shows up outside Max's building to avenge his son's death. Guess who killed his son?

Here we get our first taste of *Payne 3's* action and the series' brand new cover system. Longtime fans might balk at the idea of their

According to the devs, the game will offer a variety of aiming settings that should help provide a sense of "fluid targeting."



◀ Just one look at Max's apartment reveals he has infinitely more depth than the average shooter hero.



Max on the Mic

Voice actor James McCaffrey not only reprises his role as the voice of Max Payne, he serves as Max's motion capture double as well. Get more on the magnificent McCaffrey here: ⤴

favorite reckless detective cowering behind an endless series of chest-high walls, but the developers assured us that simply won't happen. While the snap-to, hard cover approach seems to work well—allowing Max to quickly and cleanly cozy up to any flat surface—cover is *clearly* optional. Not only will it not help his heath regenerate (only his signature painkillers can do that), the action still revolves around the series' most emulated feature: gaming's original bullet time.

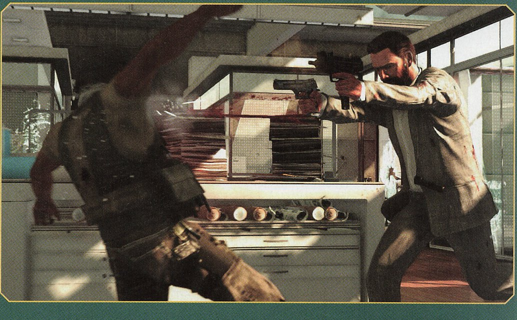
As the mobster's thugs barrel down the long, barren hallway to Max's door, Max breaks from cover and charges headlong into the fight before diving (literally) into bullet time. The impact instantly hits us right in the chest: a perfectly dramatic slow motion effect engages, the sound becomes bass-heavy and distant, and a green filter covers the screen. Max's heart pounds steadily over the whirring chatter of gunfire as bullets ripple directly past his outstretched arms, narrowly missing his head. With a pistol in each hand, he methodically drills round after round into his attackers, who visibly grimace as they slowly crumple to the ground. Eat your heart out, John Woo!

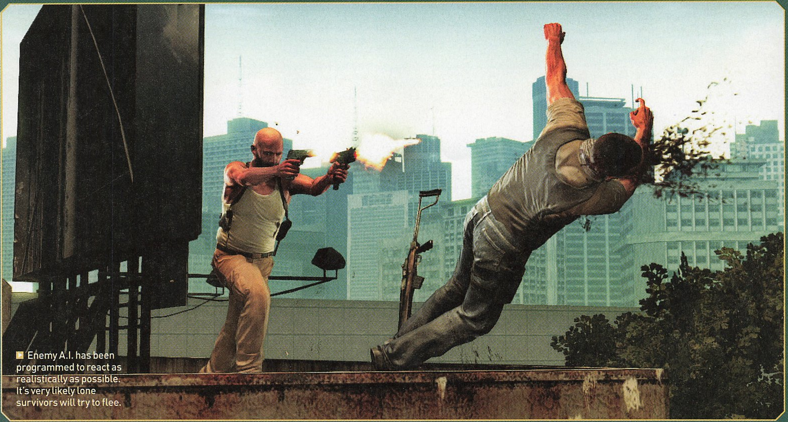
Every aspect of bullet time—from the speed of the reticule to the tense sound treatment—feels cinematic as hell and totally true to the *Max Payne* of old. And similar to the original games, Max's bullet time meter recharges whenever he fires outside of bullet time—as well as every time he pops some pills…meaning we'll be able to use the ability liberally without too much fear of running out of juice.

MOTION GRANTED

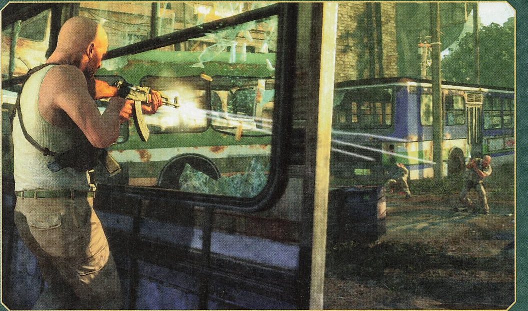
With the first wave of thugs wiped out, the developers take a moment to show off one of *Payne 3's* major focuses: natural motion. Apparently the team applied a great deal of effort to ensure Max always adjusts realistically to the surrounding environment. He visibly shifts his weight as he changes

Max's heart pounds steadily over the whirring chatter of gunfire as bullets ripple directly past his outstretched arms...





Enemy A.I. has been programmed to react as realistically as possible. It's very likely lone survivors will try to flee.



directions, braces for impact when falling, fits appropriately against dynamically created cover, and rolls and adjusts when he aims from the prone position so he can shoot in any direction. Ever failed to notice an annoying noise until it suddenly stopped? That's basically how we felt watching *Payne 3*. We never totally registered the canned animations of other games, but seeing Max move in such a believable way was a subtle yet powerful revelation.

The emphasis on natural motion apparently extends to the bad guys as well. As Max starts to pick off the second wave of goons, each one reacts as if he's actually been shot, stopping or stumbling forward while clutching at his bullet wound. Max's firearms, it seems, actually have realistic stopping power.

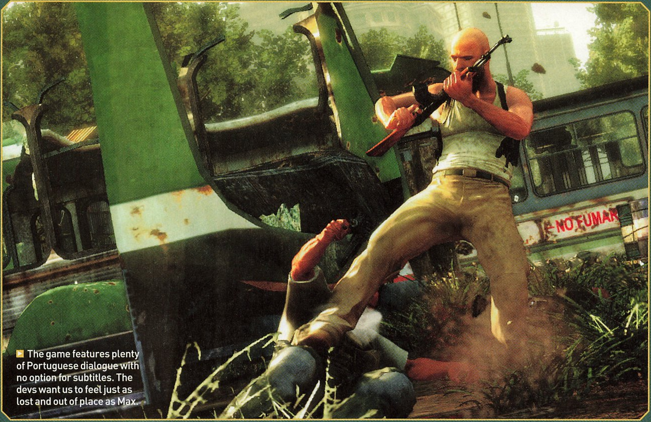
Of course, Max only makes it about halfway down the dark, dingy hallway before—apropos of nothing—a lunatic raving about fire bursts out of another apartment and begins wildly attacking the mobsters. After only a few brief, confusing moments, the madman throws open his coat to reveal some pretty serious explosives, which he subsequently uses to "cleanse" both himself and the mafia guys.

Naturally, Max survives the blast and takes a few moments to reflect on the New York skyline before we're suddenly whisked away to South America for the next mission. The level opens with an updated version of the graphic novel-style story presentation from the first two games: Max's gruff, detached narration—portions of which flash on screen for emphasis—accompany a series of heavily stylized clips that play out in boxes on different portions of the screen, similar to panels in a comic book. Everything about the presentation is perfectly, achingly noir. Longtime fans will surely be pleased.

TRUE GRIT

The narration then resolves seamlessly into a quick in-game cutscene—where we're introduced to Passos' girlfriend Giovanna—before another firefight erupts in a junkyard littered with abandoned buses. Here the action begins to develop a distinct rhythm but is certainly no less dark for its sunnier setting. With a dramatic mix of bullet time and tight over-the-shoulder shooting, Max begins to clear the area. Since he can only carry a maximum of three weapons at once (two pistols in his shoulder holsters plus another weapon in his hand), he casually discards guns as soon they run dry—one minute he's dual-wielding a pistol and an SMG and the next he's blowing holes in the dynamically destructible environment with a shotgun he grabbed off a fallen enemy. The developers explain that they wanted the action to constantly push forward. The results are decidedly badass.

Unfortunately for Max, the Brazilian PMCs



▶ The game features plenty of Portuguese dialogue with no option for subtitles. The devs want us to feel just as lost and out of place as Max.

in the junkyard are far savvier than the disorganized thugs in New York, so after flanking him a few times, Max goes down. This, however, gives the devs a chance to demonstrate "last man standing," a mechanic that gives Max a chance to revive himself by shooting his killer before his vision goes dark. Once he succeeds in saving himself, he eliminates the remaining mercenaries, with the last one receiving a stylish kill cam that follows the death-dealing bullet straight from Max's gun into the poor sap's chest. It's not only a satisfying payoff, it lets us know the area is officially bad-guy free.

From there, the cycle repeats: cutscene, gunfight, kill cam, and so on. Occasionally, however, the action is broken up by scripted bullet time events, which emerge unexpectedly over the course of standard gameplay. When they do, bullet time automatically engages and Max has just a few seconds to get off the perfect shot and save the day. For example, after stemming the infiltration of the Branco headquarters in Brazil, Max returns to the front desk to find a secretary he'd sworn to protect murdered (classic *Max Payne*). Suddenly, a jeep comes bursting through the building's glass doors, and Max has just a few seconds to jump off the desk, clear the jeep, and shoot the driver while suspended in midair. Not bad for an aging alcoholic with a pill problem.

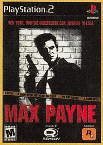
In a way, describing *Payne 3* is like trying to sell an iPad to someone who's never used one. Rather than attempting to do something outrageously new, the game simply takes existing shooter elements and improves them in subtle yet significant ways, strengthening the overall experience in the process. On paper, it may not sound like much, but in action, the difference is obvious. And as if raising the bar for the genre weren't enough, the series' signature noir spirit—complete with gratuitous bullet time and relatable John McClain, everyman sensibilities—returns in full force. Max Payne may not care about himself, but we certainly do.

We never totally registered the canned animations of other games, but seeing Max move in such a believable way was a subtle yet powerful revelation.

▲ While they declined to offer any details, the devs did confirm that *Payne 3* will offer multiplayer for the first time in the series' history.

Painful Memories

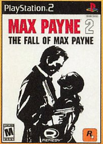
A look back at the Max Payne series thus far



Max Payne

(2001, PS2)

It's been a full 10 years since Remedy Entertainment created the original game (Rockstar acted only as the publisher), yet the majority of the franchise's formula was already in place, from bullet time to the noir aesthetics to Max's drug-induced hallucinations. The story follows NYPD detective Max as he attempts to avenge the death of his wife and child by exposing a conspiratorial drug ring.



Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne

(2003, PS2)

Remedy's follow-up was a critical success but, unfortunately, sold relatively poorly despite expanding on the solid foundation of the first game. With stronger art direction and more focused gameplay, the plot once again revolved around criminal conspiracies and Max's haunting past, though this time he partners with fugitive Mona Sax. Spoiler Alert: The ending is depressing as hell.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Because Jess plays video games the ESRB (that's the Entertainment Software Rating Board) understands that some games aren't right for everyone.
Just like movies, every game has a rating. And those ratings come from the ESRB.

www.ESRB.org

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Reviews

Your essential guide to new releases

What is a 10? Sure it's the square root of 100, but it's also considered by many to be a "perfect score." Makes sense, right? Earning 10 points out of a possible 10 certainly seems perfect since, technically, the scale doesn't actually go any higher. Perfect, however, is a very loaded word, which is why we use it ever so delicately in the description in that lovely pink box over there (seriously, go read it some time).

See, the problem is that a perfect score and a perfect game are not the same thing. At least, not to us. In our minds, no game can ever be completely and utterly without flaws. It simply can't happen. Games can move us and thrill us and change the way we look at the world, but on an objective level, there will always, *always* be something to complain about (we are gamers, after all).

So does that mean that we shouldn't give out "perfect" scores? Of course not. For us, a 10 simply means that a game is the best of the best, one that rises above the crowd in some significant way despite whatever petty problems it might possess. So please, readers, keep that in mind as you read ahead. Spolier Alert: There will be some 10s.

SAINTS ROW: THE THIRD

We tried to take a shot every time we hit someone in the nuts while playing this game, but we passed out after about five minutes. What a fun five minutes though!

RAYMAN ORIGINS

Ubisoft actually had to fight for this title since it was originally going to be used for a biographical documentary about Ray Romano. We're glad things worked out the way they did...for many reasons.

RATCHET & CLANK: ALL 4 ONE

The game itself is swell, but we mainly want to praise the subtitle for pioneering the use of numbers in place of words.

How we score our reviews...

10 Awesome
Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.

9 Excellent
Highly recommended and a great investment.

8 Great
Wonderful yet possesses minor flaws.

7 Good
Enjoyable but with definite room for improvement.

6 Acceptable
A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Mediocre
A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Flawed
Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.

3 Poor
A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful
A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.

1 Raw Sewage
Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
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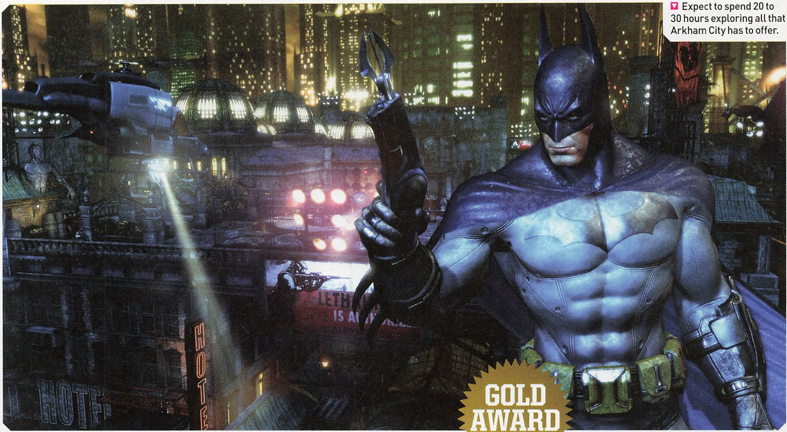
Our Highest Accolade
The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.



Expect to spend 20 to 30 hours exploring all that Arkham City has to offer.

GOLD AWARD PlayStation The Official Magazine

Batman Arkham City

More fun than any prison should be

Info

Format PS3
Pub Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.
Dev Rocksteady Studios
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like kicking ass and taking names. Lots of names.

From our perch atop an abandoned building, we survey the broken streets of the walled-in super prison known as Arkham City. Inside, thugs roam freely, beating on political prisoners wrongfully detained for protesting the compound's existence. Murderers and thieves flock to join the ranks of the Joker or Penguin, both engaged in a war for territorial control. Tyger guards—the mercenaries in charge of Arkham City's security—turn a blind eye as long as no one tries to break out. Like the supervillains of the Batman mythos, we find ourselves trapped within Arkham City's towering walls, unable to escape its captivating chaos.

From its jaw-dropping opening sequence to its equally shocking ending, *Batman: Arkham City's* campaign bursts with heart-pounding action and provocative storylines. Professor Hugo Strange—the prison's new warden—abducts Bruce Wayne for campaigning to shut Arkham down. Strange knows Wayne is Batman and even feeds him hints about "Protocol 10," a sinister plot that seemingly threatens Gotham's existence. Wayne escapes captivity but not before Strange plants the seeds of insecurity in the Caped Crusader's head: Would villains such as the Joker even exist if it weren't for Batman? Can Wayne hope to put an end to the corruption within Arkham City? The Dark Knight's self doubt makes him more relatable as a character, which in turn made us more deeply invested in his quest for justice.

The city itself is meticulously detailed. Search lights point menacingly in every direction. Graffiti marks each dilapidated building. The colorful backdrop of Gotham's distant city lights serves as a constant reminder of the decay stagnating before us. The simple act of exploring the expansive compound's grisly open-world interior is an exhilarating experience, though never overwhelming. Getting around from building to building is easy thanks to the Grapnel gun, but we had even more fun

Catwoman Five things to know about our fave feline thief

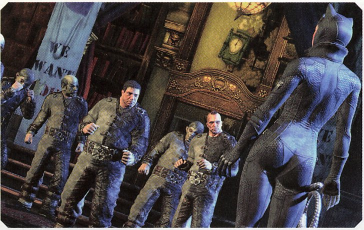
1 **Optional DLC**
Catwoman's missions must be activated using the voucher packaged with new copies of the game.

2 **Separate Story**
Batman and Catwoman will cross paths, but Selina's missions are a separate experience.

3 **Acrobatic Antics**
The Cat's movement and attack styles are far more acrobatic than Bruce Wayne's.

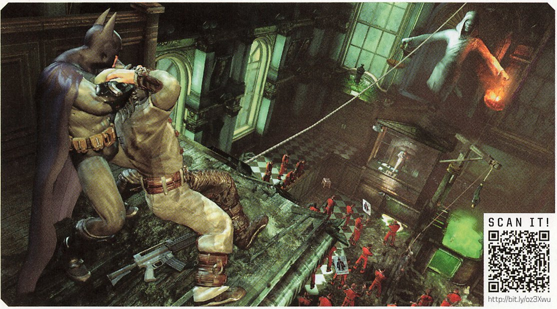
4 **Ceiling Crawl**
Catwoman can reach areas that Batman can't thanks to her ability to cling upside-down on meshed ceilings.

5 **Cat Jokes**
Only Catwoman can pick up pink Riddler trophies. Be sure to explore each location thoroughly.



Controlling Catwoman and employing her cat-tastic gadgets is an entirely new (and fun) experience.

Tons of challenge maps exist for those adept at creative stealth takedowns and beating criminals senseless.



SCAN IT!

http://bit.ly/oz3Xwu

manipulating Batman's new glide controls. Performing dive bombs allowed us to build more height mid-glide and soar for minutes at a time.

Breaking Batman

Much to our surprise (considering the top-notch quality of *Arkham Asylum's* fighting mechanics), the already excellent combat has been significantly improved. When 30 goons surrounded us in Penguin's den, our fists started flying. Two thugs attempted a cheap shot us from behind, but we countered both simultaneously, smashing their skulls together. When we suddenly got boxed in, we quickly sprayed explosive gel on the ground and detonated it, disorienting baddies without ever breaking our combo chain.

After incapacitating the ill-tempered criminals, a burly thug attacked from seemingly out of nowhere, but we were able to stun him before initiating a beatdown—a series of rapid attacks powerful enough to fell even the biggest brute. There was an appropriate solution for every type of enemy we encountered. We even disarmed foes wielding blades or guns with special counters and combos. Timing our actions with the cadence of each battle created a rhythmic dance-like fighting experience that never got stale.

Sometimes, though, we opted for a stealthier approach to combat. We used our Remote Electrical Charge gun from the shadows to force an enemy's gun to fire, frightening nearby guards. We also manipulated everything in our environment to pick thugs off one by one: Floor grates, breakable walls, and ceiling perches were all viable tools for instilling fear in the hearts of our foes.

Caped Crusades

Arkham City is full of people in need, but the game's vast selection of optional quests gave us an opportunity to help. Completing side-missions scored us experience points (useful for improving our gadgets and fighting techniques) in addition to tantalizing backstory for some of Batman's lesser-known adversaries. They also imbued the experience with a real sense of urgency, as failure to execute objectives in a timely manner often led to very real consequences. The Riddler *burned a man alive* after we failed to solve his riddle. If only we had acted faster, the man might not have met his gruesome fate. Lives are constantly at risk behind Arkham's gates, and this time, Batman can't save everyone.

Rocksteady Studios had high expectations to live up to following the success of *Arkham Asylum*, and we weren't disappointed. *Arkham City* should be celebrated as a shining achievement for the action-adventure genre for its masterful execution.

The Dark Knight is no longer a beacon of hope exclusive to Gotham's citizens; he now represents the standard to which action games should be held.

RYAN TALJONICK

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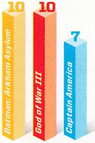
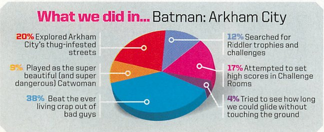
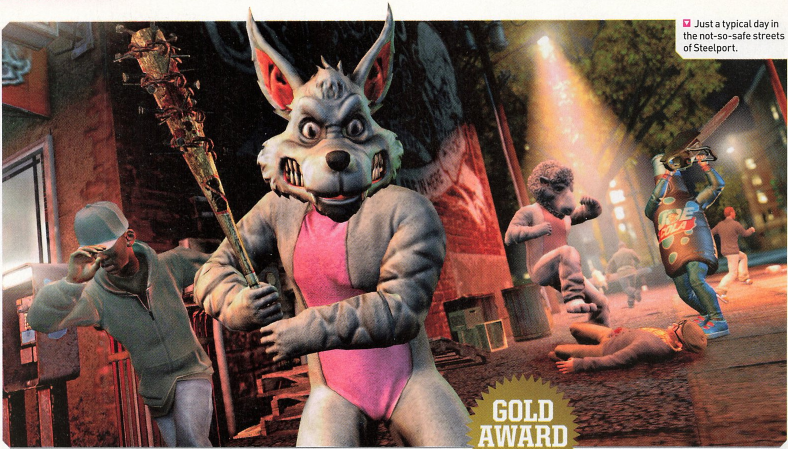


ScorePole

When it comes to action-adventure games, *Batman: Arkham City* raises the bar.





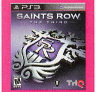
Just a typical day in the not-so-safe streets of Steelport.

GOLD AWARD PlayStation The Official Magazine

Saints Row The Third

Highway to the crazy zone

Info



Format PS3
Pub THQ
Dev Volition
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like an open-world game with all the cheat codes on.

Over the course of a mere 30 minutes with *Saints Row: The Third,* all of our sandbox game fantasies came true. We attempted a high-stakes bank heist. We survived an intense gunfight 30,000 feet in the air as we plummeted toward the ground. We tossed hookers like rag dolls, punched policemen in the junk, and suplexed mobsters before 'jacking their vehicles and doing victory doughnuts around their corpses. *Third* is unapologetic in its absurdity, brimming with dick jokes, explosions, and guns. It's everything we've ever secretly wanted in a sandbox game.

Welcome to Steelport

The Third Street Saints are at odds with a multi-national crime organization known as the Syndicate and find themselves stranded in Steelport—the home turf of their new enemies. Three gangs collectively form the Syndicate and control the city: the mask-wearing Luchadores, the tech-savvy Deckers, and the highbrow Morningstar. Our overarching goal is to take control of the city and show the Syndicate that the Saints don't go down without a fight. First, though, we have to step back into the role of the Saints' leader. Cue the character creation process, which features the most robust set of customization options we've ever seen. Once we'd crafted our metallic blue-skinned heroine (complete with dreads and a burly man's voice), we took to claiming Steelport's streets.

In order to gain control of the city, we had to purchase buildings and participate in side activities. *Saints Row 2* favorites like Insurance Fraud make a welcome return, but new activities had us grinning with joy as well. We adored wreaking havoc in a tank and taking out gangs with an attack helicopter, though our personal favorite was Professor Genki's Super

Fun Time Five reasons why Saints Row: The Third rocks

Whored Mode A game mode wherein we survive waves of scantily clad assailants.

Campaign Co-op Try this hilarious action-packed adventure alongside a friend.

Customization Custom characters can be uploaded for others to download!

Spot-on Humor The toilet humor may get a bit juvenile at times, but it's never forced.

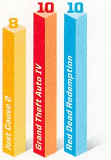
Awesome Toys A hover jet that shoots lasers? A phallus-shaped bat? Yep.

STAG is an anti-gang military operation sent by the government to ruin our fun in Steelport. Tip: steal their hover jets.

No need to fear jumping out of an aircraft. We're equipped with a parachute at all times.

Ethical Reality Climax. The hilarious parody of Japanese game shows had us executing costume-clad contestants as quickly as possible while avoiding all sorts of traps.

In addition to netting us partial control of the city, completing activities earned us cash flow and Respect. In contrast to *Row 2*, however, Respect no longer progresses campaign missions. Instead, it acts as a resource for leveling up and unlocking the ability to purchase skill upgrades. We could use it to increase our total health, dual wield certain weapons, and score powerful guns for members of our gang. Considering we started the game with a huge arsenal at our disposal—including a rocket launcher—we were impressed *Third* managed to maintain a sense of balance. Upgrading firearms is important due to the increasing toughness of enemies, and limited ammo capacities kept even the deadliest weapons from feeling overpowered.



ScorePole

Third is just crazy enough to join the ranks of the sandbox greats. We couldn't put it down.

Master of Disaster

Yet *Third's* most impressive feat lies in its top-notch execution of traditionally subpar open-world elements. Its finely tuned shooting mechanics are vastly superior to those of other sandbox titles, and its driving segments rival standalone arcade racers. Even the melee combat scratches a previously unreachable itch thanks to a hilarious variety of nutshots, clotheslines, and choke slams.

The meat of *Third's* gameplay is found in its obnoxiously awesome campaign, which boasts some of gaming's most memorable action set pieces. In one mission, we sky dived with guns blazing toward a mansion owned by the Morningstar. After crashing their party and eliminating their thugs, we ransacked the place and turned it into a stronghold of our own. In another mission, we tackled a unique, *Tron*-inspired cyber world as we hunted the leader of the Deckers. We piloted hover jets, rappelled down buildings, killed thousands of goons, and never got bored for a second. Every mission is exciting and worthwhile.

Of course, playing through the campaign with a buddy via drop-in co-op (local and online) exponentially increases *Third's* fun factor. We had a blast double-teaming rival gangs, taking illegally obtained sports cars out for joyrides, and laughing at the game's crass, punchy humor. A comedy is always best experienced with company, and we've never felt more unbridled joy during a multiplayer session.

There are minor issues to be found: the graphics aren't impressive, and we occasionally got caught up in the environment, causing us to get teleported to safety. But who cares? Volition managed to take everything we love about open-world games and distill it into a chaotic (but contained) package without any boring fluff. *Third* may be dumb fun, but it's the smartest realization of the sandbox spirit we've seen in a long while. **RYAN TALJONICK**

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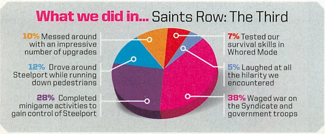
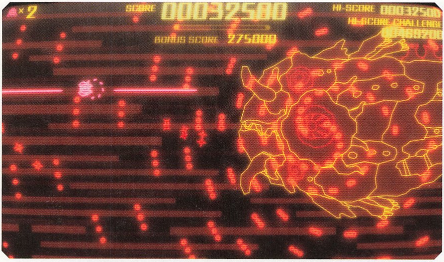
What we did in... Saints Row: The Third





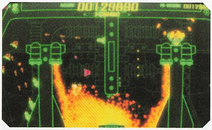
PixelJunk SideScroller

Vertical is for losers

These days it seems anything retro is cool, and Q-Games' highly popular *PixelJunk* series of downloadable PSN games has just gone truly retro. Their latest offering comes in the form of a lovingly conceived glance back at the golden age of shmups. *PixelJunk SideScroller* is exactly what it sounds like: a sidescrolling shooter that's styled in a glorious glowing neon color palette. The game oozes pixel-perfect precision, both in its presentation and the skills required to conquer its sometimes brutal levels.

The neon fighter under our command is able to switch between three different weapons systems on the fly: machine guns, lasers, and missiles. All can be powered up five times by picking up common drops from enemies, but the machine gun is generally less powerful than the lasers and bi-directional missiles. We also have a spin attack as a last resort option that can be useful for nailing entire strings of enemies, not to mention snagging a Trophy or two.

The levels all require careful navigation, and the game's unique liquid and gas system adds a new strategic element beyond the norm: Accidentally swerve through magma or get hit by green gas clouds and it's a quick death unless a pocket of icy water can quickly be found.



Dodging stupid amounts of bullets is fun, frustrating, and addictive all at the same time.

Info
Format PSN
Pub SCEA **Dev** Rebellion
Price $9.99 **ESRB** Everyone
It's like the shooter a glow stick would make.

And then there are the bullets and bombs to counter. *SideScroller* doesn't mess around. If keeping track of 800 projectiles at once doesn't sound appealing, well, there's always *flOw*.

Lovers of shmups, however, know the joy of learning attack patterns. Little comes close to the sense of achievement gleaned from surviving what at first seem like impossible odds. It's a brutal but forgiving mistress. The liberal smattering of checkpoints really help prevent egregious DualShock mutilation, but crank up the difficulty setting and watch the blood pressure start to rise. Accentuated by some splendid-looking, challenging boss fights, it's a steal for fans of the genre. Throw in local two-player co-op along with the ability to record gameplay sessions (and upload and share them via YouTube), and *SideScroller* represents a truly solid, challenging PSN buy.

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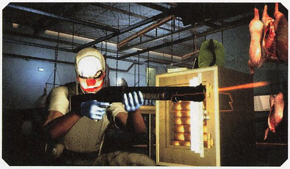
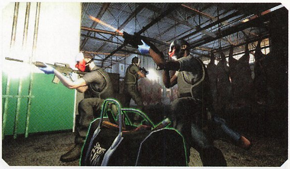
BRYN WILLIAMS



Since *Left 4 Dead's* not on PS3, try this instead!



Payday The Heist

This is a robbery!

Info
Format PSN
Pub SOE
Dev Overkill
Price $19.99
ESRB Mature
It's like a sophisticated horde mode with cops.

Equal parts *Point Break* and *Call of Duty: Black Ops'* zombie mode, *Payday: The Heist* sends a team of four well-armed thieves on a series of six unconnected jobs, from a straightforward bank robbery to a messy prison break. Each mission tasks the team with various objectives that gradually allow them to progress through each level as they fight off the cops, who'll use everything from snipers to smoke bombs to stop them. Unfortunately, the objectives (and the game's leveling system) are often poorly explained, which can create confusion, and the basic shooter mechanics feel stiff and clunky.

Still, the simple, accessible premise produces plenty of fun, especially when played with friends. Calling out orders and coordinating attacks while pushing toward the next objective always got our adrenaline pumping. Plus, the customization system is deep enough to encourage people to specialize, which in turn allows for deeper pre-heist planning. This helps compensate for the lackluster presentation and gives the experience more longevity than expected. Just remember: Better. With. Friends. **SCOTT BUTTERWORTH**

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Rune Factory Tides of Destiny

As fun as waiting for the tide to roll in

Info
Format PS3
Pub Natsume **Dev** Neverland
Price $49.99 **ESRB** Everyone 10+
It's like having lots to do but not much reason to do it.

Natsume no longer bills *Rune Factory* as "a fantasy *Harvest Moon*," and that makes sense. The series has gradually become less and less a farming sim. It's more like an action RPG with farming in it... plus crafting, desert island exploration, a dating simulation, and a 2D fighter pitting a "plant golem" against tentacled sea creatures.

There's plenty to do, in other words, and that's the game's greatest strength: the freedom to choose almost any activity at any time. Trouble is, none of these gameplay systems are especially involving—not the combat, not the farming, not the fetch-and-carry quests. *Destiny* tends to feel a mile wide and an inch deep.

Rune Factory 3 picked up the slack with personality. It had beautiful 2D backgrounds and characters that ranged from "likable" to "excitingly insane." This game looks and acts pretty bland by comparison. Low-rent 3D rendering doesn't do the design work any favors, and the character concepts need more depth to stick with us after we stop playing.

If combat were more challenging, the quests more creative, or the cast weird enough to distract us, *Destiny's* gameplay grab bag could work. As it stands, this one needed more time before harvesting. **DAVID F. SMITH**

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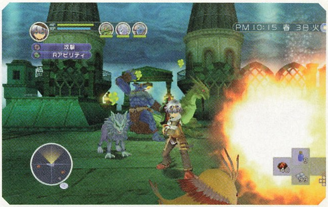
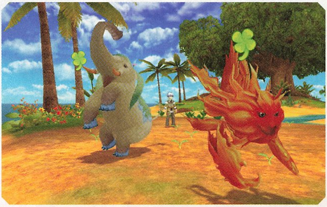
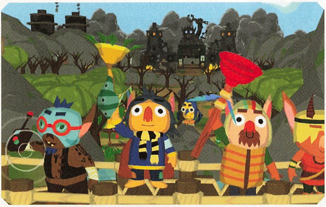
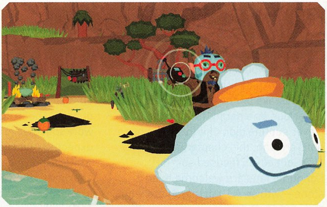


▼ Some monsters can be tamed and put to work on the farm. Look for ones that seem too cute to kill.







◀ The cloud-whales are ultra eco-friendly and adorable. They're basically Captain Planet in cloud form.

Info
Format PSN
Pub HandCircus
Pub HandCircus
Price $14.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like getting the green cred without having to recycle.

Okabu

Al Gore would love it

We're saving the world one polluted pond and factory dumping ground at a time—all in a day's work for Nimbe and Kumulo, two cloud-whales sent to save the Yorubo tribe and its land from the industrial Doza.

Okabu is an adventure title full of puzzles designed to promote environmental consciousness. With the help of the game's four heroes, the cloud-whales recycle toxic materials, water plants to clean the air, and destroy machines enslaving the peaceful Yorubo.

The lack of camera control can be a nuisance at times, and during lengthier levels, we found ourselves wishing for checkpoints. However, these issues are overshadowed by the fun factor and low price. Saving the world may be old news to gamers, but *Okabu* focuses more on preserving and protecting it. It's educational in a way that doesn't make us sleepy, and we can appreciate a game that makes us question our lifestyle. The simple art style lends undeniable "cuteness" to the game, but the overall environmentalist theme and challenging puzzles ensure it is appropriate for players of all ages. **ANNE LEWIS**

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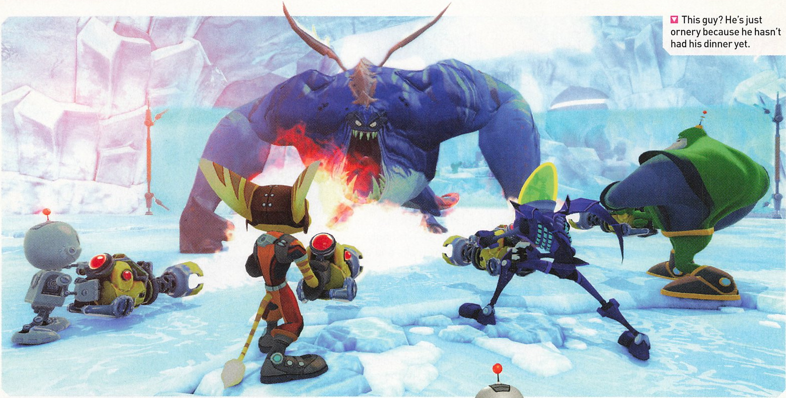
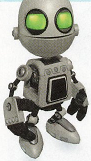


This guy? He's just ornery because he hasn't had his dinner yet.

Ratchet & Clank

All 4 One

Bring a friend or three!



Info

Format PS3
Pub SCEA
Dev Insomniac Games
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like a buddy comedy beat-'em-up.

Judging *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One* as we would the series' next single-player installment would be a mistake on the level of hiring Dr. Nefarious as a nanny. In case the clever subtitle didn't hit this point quite hard enough, this chapter's a drop-in/drop-out co-op focused spin-off. Longtime fans are welcome to go it alone—with an A.I. partner in tow—but expecting an experience on par with previous entries will likely lead to disappointment. With that out of the way, we're happy to report *All 4 One*, is a blast when played with buddies locally or online.

The so-crazy-it-works setup sees the eponymous duo teaming up with lovable buffoon Captain Qwark and the oh-so-evil Dr. Nefarious. The unlikely quartet's been kidnapped and must work together to get back home, with expectedly hilarious results. The story, while displaying shades of the sharpness the series is known for, primarily serves as justification for getting these frenemies together. That said, narrative depth doesn't seem so important when there are robo-minions to thwart, bosses to best, and puzzles to solve alongside three of our greatest pals.

United We Stand

Anyone who's been swinging Ratchet's wrench since the PS2 days will feel comfortable behind the familiar controls, but the classic gadgets (there's no substitute for a good Combuster at your side) are complemented by cool new toys like Ratchet's Doppelbanger (a turret-outfitted decoy). The best additions, however, are those built from the ground up with co-op play in mind. The Hookshot, for example, allows players to attach to each other, making platforming a breeze. But it's the Vac-U 4000 that really defines the team-based dynamic: From triggering puzzle elements and sucking up bolts to hurling players across gaps and steering vehicles, this baby does way more than the average dustbuster.

Unlike the nuanced combat of

Team Play Five great All 4 One co-op mechanics

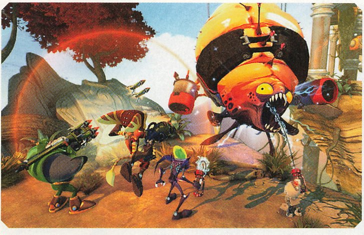
1 **Drive** Piloting vehicles while cooperatively shifting players' weights takes real teamwork.

2 **Tether** It only takes a press of the Triangle button to latch on to a nearby buddy and cheat death.

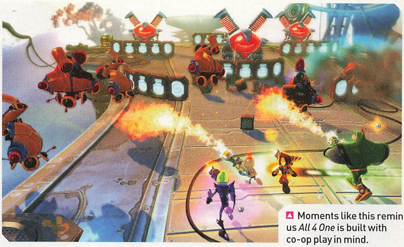
3 **Shoot** Big bads go down much faster when four crosshairs are staring them down. Focus fire!

4 **Suck** Using the Vac-U 4000 to suck-and-chuck other players never gets old. We just wish we had a real one.

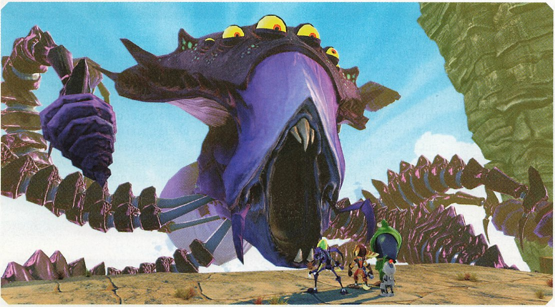
5 **Grief** Sometimes teamwork's overrated—betray buddies for a brimming bolt count.



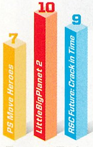
▼ We were just minding our own business and enjoying the scenic route when this giant purple octopus...thing came out of nowhere.



▲ Moments like this remind us *All 4 One* is built with co-op play in mind.



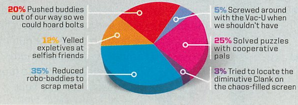
previous games, *All 4 One* adopts more of a guns-blazing approach. Damage multipliers are awarded when all members focus their shots on a single enemy, and filling the screen with as much destruction as possible is often preferable to strategy-minded tactics. Still, our brains get a bit of a workout when facing the more sophisticated bosses and puzzles, especially when utilizing the aforementioned co-op-focused gear. One such instance sees the Lombax and his pals wakeboarding while avoiding mines, jumping ramps, and working collectively to destroy the enormous sea monster nipping at their heels. Of course, in true *Ratchet & Clank* fashion, this Loch Ness-like menace ends up looking like a guppy next to his big brother; soon enough, the foursome's scaling a lighthouse as another screen-eclipsing beast threatens to eat them whole. The epic encounter concludes with the heroes combining forces to free electricity-laced slugs with their Vac-Us before feeding the slugs to their indigestion-prone predator.



ScorePole

While *All 4 One* doesn't quite live up to previous R&C entries, its still a blast with friends.

What we did in... Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One



Smash and Grab

This is just one of a number of well-paced sequences that capture the infectious charm and addictive gameplay of the series while also adapting the engaging formula to the cooperative framework. *All 4 One's* presentation, while not quite on par with its Pixar-rivaling predecessors, is also pretty consistent with the level of polish we've come to expect. From impressive sci-fi flavored interiors to gorgeously organic outdoor environments, this won't be mistaken for anything but a richly realized *Ratchet & Clank* universe.

As fun as it is battling baddies, collecting bolts, platforming, and puzzling with friends, the near constant on-screen chaos occasionally becomes unmanageable. While there are certainly some not-to-be-missed four-player moments, we recommend recruiting no more than two players for an optimal adventure. Another sticking point, especially for hardcore fans, will be the title's accessibility. Not only is it less challenging than previous entries, dying carries little consequence since players can spawn back in next to still-active partners.

Despite our disclaimer-like intro, we do need to address the game's solo play. Simply put, it's a far cry from the franchise's dedicated single-player titles. Sure, it retains much of their surface appeal, but a number of deeper issues—most notably the fixed, pulled-back camera and the presence of all four characters in cutscenes—serve as continuous reminders we'd be having more fun playing with friends. Seasoned fans that stubbornly stick to solo play can look forward to making plenty of negative comparisons to *All 4 One's* superior predecessors. Those who embrace this fresh take for what it is, however, will find themselves happier than a spotlight-stealing Captain Qwark.

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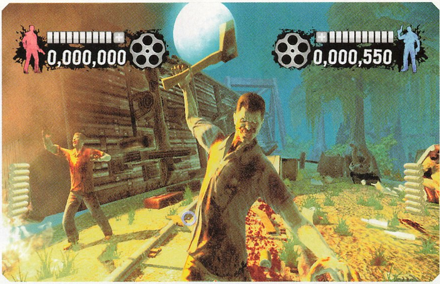
MATT CABRAL

House of the Dead
OVERKILL Extended Cut

Guts, gore, and motion controls

Info

Format PS3
Pub Sega
Dev Headstrong Games
Price $39.99
ESRB Mature
It's like a George Romero version of *The Shoot* produced by Quentin Tarantino.



With not one but two gun-shaped attachments, it's odd that there aren't more on-rails shooters for Sony's motion controller—especially when you consider how well this *House of the Dead* prequel works. While the upgraded-to-HD graphics and two new levels don't make this "Extended" enough for anyone who already played the Wii version, *OVERKILL*—which brings a Grindhouse art style and scratchy camera tricks to this B-movie-flavored series—offers plenty of action for those who missed the 2009 original.

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0,003,025

Using a multitude of effective weapons, Agent G and Detective Washington have to take on an army of limber zombies. Pretty standard, but what makes this gun game stand out is how it bucks the genre's more annoying tenets: The story mode isn't shorter than a double feature, its gore is more realistic than cartoony, and the automatic reloading—which replaces the usual shoot-outside-the-screen move—keeps the action flowing. Add in some genuine frights, hilariously ribald dialog, and inventive boss battles, and it becomes clear why there should be more on-rails shooters for the Move. Well, ones as good as *OVERKILL*, anyway. **PAUL SEMEL**

PlayStation 8

Crysis

Format **PSN** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Crytek**
Price **$19.99** ESRB **Mature**

First released as a PC game in 2007, *Crysis* was exalted for its gorgeous graphics and notorious for its high-end hardware requirements. The PSN port doesn't look as pretty and there are frame-rate issues when the on-screen action becomes too intense, but it's still a credible FPS contender. Sure the game lacks the epic scale of *Crysis 2*, but the gameplay is more engaging as the sequel's Tactical Visor "cheat sheet" doesn't yet exist here. It's left to us to determine the best tactic—stealth or max firepower—for offing enemies. How refreshing.

PlayStation 8

ROGER BURCHILL

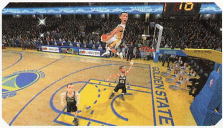
Castlevania
Harmony of Despair

Format **PSN** Pub **Konami** Dev **Konami**
Price **$14.99** ESRB **Teen**

Cobbled together from the recycled remains of several recent *Castlevania* games, *Harmony of Despair* favors multiplayer co-op over the expansive solo campaigns of the series' past. Aside from running around and hacking up undead across massive 2D castles, very few of the gameplay nuances are properly explained. Still, a great selection of familiar characters, weapons, and abilities make the grind semi-rewarding for those willing to stick with it.

PlayStation 6

NATHAN MEUNIER



NBA Jam
On Fire Edition

Format **PSN** Pub **EA Sports** Dev **EA Canada**
Price **$14.99** ESRB **Everyone**

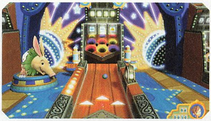
After diving into the over-the-top arcade hoops action of *NBA Jam: On Fire Edition*, it's tough to imagine going back to regular old b-ball again. The frenetic two-on-two matches are bursting with crazy turbo boosts, flaming basketballs galore, and goofy stunts that spice up the fun. *On Fire Edition's* gameplay is as tight as ever, and the subtle tweaks and balances that refine the experience are numerous. We dug the re-worked campaign mode, but multiplayer matches for up to four players just can't be beat.

PlayStation 8

NATHAN MEUNIER

Carnival Island

Format **PS3** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Magic Pixel Games** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone**

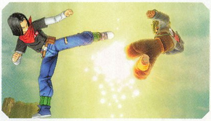


Carnival Island offers family-friendly fun for up to four players at a time, but its range of activities is severely limited by its carnival-games theme. There are eight main games, including skee ball and ring toss, but most involve the same movements and offer little variety. On top of this, each game has unlockable variant modes that lead to even more repetition. The only activity that isn't an over-or-underhand toss is the Shooting Gallery, which simply requires players to point at the screen and fire. *Carnival Island* is extremely easy, but with a projected audience of families with young children, this is understandable. **ANNE LEWIS**

PlayStation 6

Dragon Ball Z Ultimate Tenkaichi

Format **PS3** Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **Spike** Price **$59.99** ESRB **Teen**

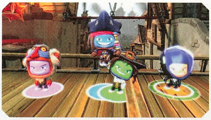


Dragon Ball Z's combat has always been larger than life, and *Ultimate Tenkaichi* does a fine job of conveying these massive, sprawling battles—or at least it looks like it does. The combat appears to be fast and brutal, but in practice, it's less challenging than we would have liked. *Tenkaichi's* plentiful single-player content is adequate but limited and often interrupted by lengthy load times. In the end, *Ultimate Tenkaichi* plays like an episode of the show it's based on: fun but shallow, with a whole lot of waiting around between fights. Maybe it's time for the series to go all Super Saiyan and change things up a bit. **HOLLANDER COOPER**

PlayStation 6

Disney Universe

Format **PS3** Pub **Disney Interactive Studios** Dev **Eurocom** Price **$49.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

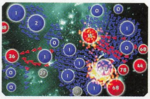


© Disney

If dressing up as Disney characters and smacking bad guys with sticks is wrong, we don't want to be right. *LittleBigPlanet's* Sackboys meet *LEGO Star Wars'* gameplay in a cooperative adventure set in the universes of six different Disney properties (*Wall-E, Pirates of the Caribbean, Alice in Wonderland, Monsters Inc., Aladdin,* and *The Lion King*). Basic combat and platforming make up a bulk of this charming, simplistic game, but just because it's aimed at the casual crowd doesn't mean it isn't fun. *Disney Universe* is a nostalgic trip through Disney's history that should provide a fair bit of enjoyment for all Disney fans, small or large, and promises of DLC have us eager for more. **HOLLANDER COOPER**

PlayStation 7

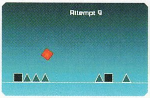
Minis Roundup



Galcon Labs

Price **$2.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Numerical interplanetary warfare may not sound very sexy, but *Galcon Labs* packs an addictive punch with its real-time puzzle combat. Sending droves of planetary fleets to divide and conquer the playing field offers intense thrills, and stomping opponents into nothingness is endlessly satisfying. **BUY**

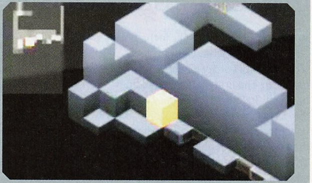


The Impossible Game

Price **$2.99** ESRB **Everyone**

It took us 174 attempts just to beat the first stage in the appropriately titled *The Impossible Game*, and that was just on practice mode. This musical rhythm platformer is beyond sadistic yet still fun to attempt. Dodging spikes and platforms at high speeds with exact precision rocks. **BUY**

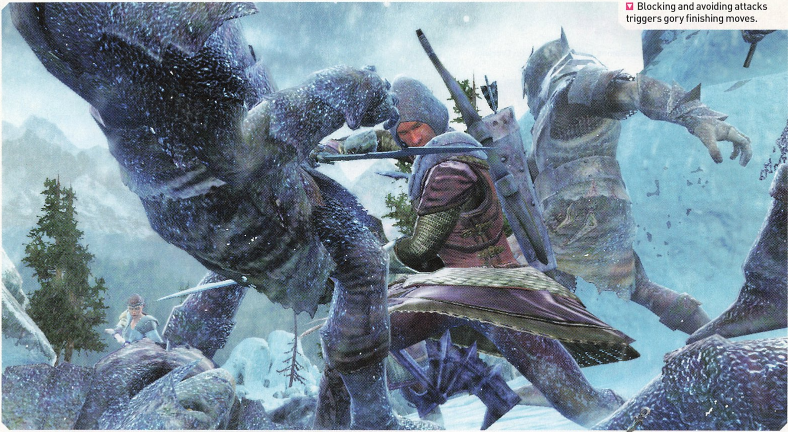
Mini of the Month



Edge

Price **$4.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Rolling a solid cube around isometric stages brimming with spring-loaded platforms, transforming blocks, and cool secrets is where the fun is at in this excellent retro puzzle platformer. The PSP's directional pad gives us tighter controls than the original iPhone version did, while ultra-creative level designs and intriguing gameplay make Edge a must-download pick. **BUY**



Blocking and avoiding attacks triggers gory finishing moves.

Lord of the Rings
War in the North
One bloodbath to rule them all

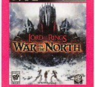
Those hoping to frolic in the Shire with Frodo may want to steer clear of *Lord of the Rings: War in the North*. The first Mature-rated title based on Tolkien's rich fantasy universe, this hack-and-slasher is more concerned with lopping off Orc limbs than puffing on Hobbit pipes. That said, anyone interested in painting Middle-earth in blood and guts with sharpened steel and piercing projectiles will want to sign up for this satisfying, albeit flawed, action RPG.

Developed by dungeon-crawling veterans Snowblind Studios, *North* is a co-op focused affair that allows fans to form their very own Fellowships. As a human, dwarf, and elf, we embark on an adventure that should please anyone who sat through Peter Jackson's epic film trilogy. In a welcome twist, though, the game follows a narrative path running parallel to the movies'. Rather than rehashing a story we've already heard, it weaves a "What if?" scenario that sees the trio thwarting a northern threat that, if uncontested, could ultimately interfere with Frodo's ring-frying plans.

Gore War

Of course, storytelling soon takes a back seat to Orc slaying as the heroes are thrust into a world brimming with baddies. Bloody and brutal, *North's* fast, gore-soaked combat is its crowning

Info



Format PS3
Pub Warner Bros. Interactive
Dev Snowblind Studios
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like fighing evil one limb at a time.

Fellowship of Friends Five reasons to start recruiting

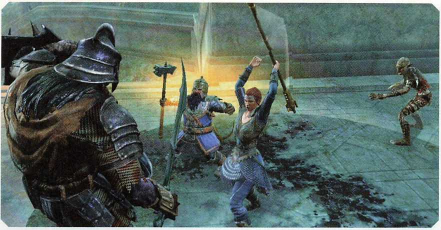
1 **Fight** During boss fights, have one member hold off minions while the others hack away at the primary threat.

2 **Heal** Players have limited time to revive downed partners. Keep your party close to prevent any deaths.

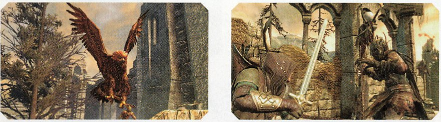
3 **Strategize** Have one player thin enemy ranks with ranged attacks while the rest charge in for close-up kills.

4 **Search** Each class has a skill for accessing hidden areas, but all members reap the rewards of their loot-finding friend.

5 **Give** Exchange weapons, armor, and other loot within the party to maximize each player's potential.



The campaign can be tackled in splitscreen co-op, but completing it as an online trio is the way to go.



RPG fans will have ample opportunity to loot and level their way through Middle-earth.

achievement. The formula—light and heavy combos mixed with blocking and evasion moves—will feel familiar to anyone who's unsheathed a broadsword in similar games. However, the fluidity of the gameplay—as well as the obscenely gory animations—overshadows any been-there-slashed-that monotony. Whether rearranging a beast's ribcage with a battle axe or introducing a troll's face to a flurry of arrows, the combat engages the thumbs and eyes equally.

On top of utilizing traditional ranged and melee skills, we have to make use of character-specific abilities and enhanced attacks earned and upgraded through leveling. The RPG aspects aren't deep, but their simplicity and accessibility nicely complement the title's action-heavy gameplay. Additionally, some skills—such as a shielded dome conjured by the elf—come in especially handy when playing with pals.

While decapitating enemies never got old, other aspects of *North* fall short. The camera gets schizophrenic in close quarters, the levels are rather linear, and the visuals, while often impressive, generally lack the level of polish we've come to expect this generation. Furthermore, the spotty A.I. partners during our solo jaunts mostly just reminded us that the game should be enjoyed with friends. While these shortcomings siphon some fun from the experience, nothing can steal the joy that comes with staining a snow-white battlefield with buckets of Orc blood.

PlayStation The Official Magazine

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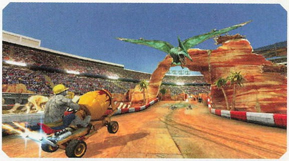
MATT CABRAL



Four-player splitscreen and online play are simply fun.

Jimmie Johnson's Anything with an Engine

Gentleman, start your sofas!

Info

PS3
JIMMIE JOHNSON'S
Anything With An Engine
KONAMI

Format PS3
Pub Konami/ Autumn Games
Dev Isopod Studios
Price $29.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like a fun, familiar ride with a goofy relative.

The latest contender to the coveted kart-racing cup, *Jimmie Johnson's Anything with an Engine* is a budget-priced racer that doesn't break the mold but does bring some fresh ideas and plenty of personality to the genre. As the title suggests, we get behind the wheel of anything with a motor strapped to it: lawnmowers, shopping carts, La-Z-Boys, and even coffins—each with its own stats—to tear down the tracks. Of course, this wouldn't be a proper kart racer without weapons, so mines, missiles, and other competition-sabotaging toys can be unleashed from these ridiculous rides.

The game mixes the familiar formula with some fun features, such as pit stops—which replenish health and weapons—and modes that go beyond the expected timed and versus events. Matador, for example, sees two sets of competitors racing in opposite directions, while Survival allows eliminated players to return as explosive chickens. While it's a bit too wacky for its own good, its undeniable charm and pick-up-and-play appeal keep it on track. **MATT CABRAL**

PlayStation The Official Magazine

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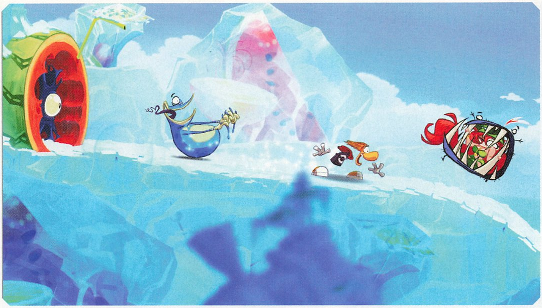
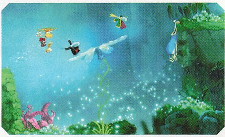


All of *Origins'* characters speak in the world's greatest language: Pig Latin.



Rayman Origins

A 2D contender in a 3D world

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

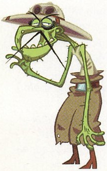
UbiArt
Why does *Rayman Origins* look so incredible? Because every environment, character, and animation was hand-drawn and placed directly into the game via Ubisoft's new UbiArt game engine.

It's been eight years since Rayman last made a headlining appearance on a PlayStation console. We'd all but forgotten the limbless dude until we got our hands on *Rayman Origins*, and truth be told, we didn't expect to be so thoroughly captivated. That said, we haven't seen a platformer of this caliber in years.

Origins returns Rayman to his 2D roots and is filled to the brim with gorgeous hand-drawn environments, blazing-fast platforming, and a huge variety of gameplay mechanics.

The premise is fairly simple: complete each level by finding and freeing magical beings called Electoons. These cuddly creatures are essentially the fabric of the Glade of Dreams, the world in which Rayman and his friends reside. If the Electoons aren't freed from their cages, the world will fall into darkness—but more importantly, saving them unlocks collectibles and secret areas to explore.

Each zone is packed with deadly enemies and traps, so don't expect an easy ride. Rayman can usually take down goons with a single strike and can actually use his hair as a helicopter to slow his descent for accurate platforming. Yet when it comes to traps, most require keen observation to avoid. In the watery world of the Angsty Abyss, we swam past mobile blowfish and spiny sea urchins while fighting an opposing current. In the Grumbling Grottos desert, we bypassed swarms of angry bats by taking refuge in temporary spheres of light, emitted when we hit special gongs. We even encountered sidescrolling shooting segments and unique boss fights along the way. Some areas require cautious movement while others demand split-second action with no margin for error. Considering *Origins* has 60 levels, we were amazed that no two stages ever felt the same.



Info
Format PS3 **Pub** Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Montpellier
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Everyone
It's like the triumphant return of our favorite...rabbit...thing.

Origins also has plenty of collectibles and secrets worth finding. Snagging score-increasing Lums was rarely difficult, but picking up valuable Skull Coins required perfect platforming timing. Soon our "just one more level" mentality turned into hours of fun, and we gave up trying to tear ourselves away from *Origins'* overwhelming allure.

When we began utilizing the local drop-in co-op support, however, our experience grew a bit more chaotic. When limited to just two-players, co-op was great. We dug hoisting our companion on our hands so he could reach otherwise inaccessible collectibles, and struggling to revive one another when we died was always an amusing spectacle. But once three or four players took to the screen, chaos ensued. A friendly fire mechanic (which can't be disabled) meant we often sent our friends to an accidental grave, and it was easy to lose track of which character we were controlling. *Origins'* multiplayer may be a goofy, fun time, but it adds a layer of clutter that's hard to digest.

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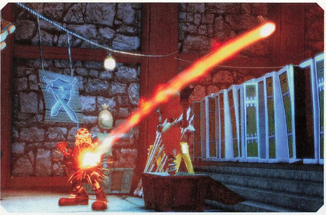
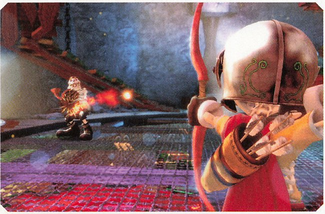
Is it still worth checking out? Absolutely. The campaign is gorgeous, engaging, and refreshing. And hey, what's a little unintended killing amongst platforming friends? **RYAN TALJONICK**



Take on the undead hordes as a member of...the undead. Oh, the irony!



Medieval Moves
Deadmund's Quest
Bag of bones

Info
Format PS3 **Pub** SCEA
Dev San Diego Studios/Zindagi
Price $39.99 **ESRB** Everyone 10+
It's like *Army of Darkness*... for kids!

In games, using a large mace to bash in the skull of a skeleton is a pretty common activity. What no one ever realizes is that skeletons are people too. Or, more accurately, were people. *Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest* gives us a more personal look into the life of the undead as we take on the role of Edmund, a young prince transformed into a skeleton by an evil sorcerer. The only way to transform back? Slaughter a bunch of other skeletons. This is sure to cause psychiatric problems for the young prince.

Quest requires a Move controller, and all of the gameplay requires physical activity. We have to slash away at enemies by swiping the controller through the air or toss throwing stars at foes by flicking our wrists. Arrows can be plucked by bringing the controller behind our head and aimed with a steady arm pointed at the TV. Sitting down while playing is not an option.

Despite the many undead warriors, *Quest* is a kids' game. The humor is inoffensive, filled with prat falls and puns. But there is violence, so kids younger than eight should probably stay away. Unfortunately, for those older than 10, the weak jokes and repetitive gameplay will likely be a turnoff. As for hardcore gamers looking to put their Move to good use, *Deadmund* comes off as dull, skippable filler. **RUSS FRUSHTICK**

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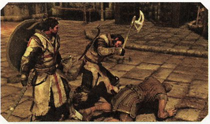

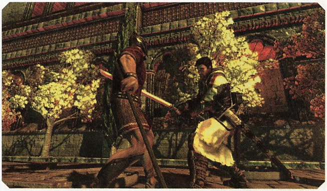

The Cursed Crusade
Oh, there was plenty of cursing...

Assassin's Creed was hugely successful in bringing the Crusades to life, examining this dark time in history and pulling out intriguing story lines and characters. *The Cursed Crusade*, on the other hand, looks elsewhere for inspiration by asking, "What if there were demons in the Crusades?" Yes, the question no one was asking is finally answered.

The Cursed Crusade is a third-person action game that has us swinging swords and blasting crossbows at waves of enemy knights. Sound fun? Don't get too excited. Even for a budget title the combat system is nothing short of a clunky mess, with slow animations and unsatisfying combos. The game's hero, Denz de Bayle, can be upgraded with new combos and can transform into a demon for short spans, but there's really no need for that as hammering the attack button got us through most every battle.

The graphics are equally disastrous, as if they were designed for the last generation of consoles. Animations are stiff and awkward, and the physics engine breaks more often than it works. Screenshots do not do this game justice—trust us, it looks way worse in action. Frankly the only design decision we approve of is that *Crusade* allows players to skip the dozens of boring, tedious cutscenes that break up every single level. Of course, that just means the game's combat is back that much sooner. Pick your poison. **RUSS FRUSHTICK**

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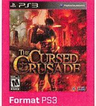
Info



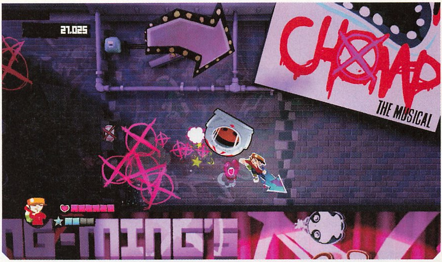
Format PS3
Pub Atlus USA
Dev Kylotonn Games
Price $39.99
ESRB Mature
It's like all the fun(?) of the real Crusades. But with demons.

Sideway New York

Street art fights back

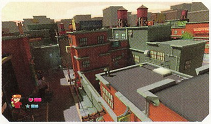
Info

Format PSN
Pub SOE
Dev Play Brains/ Fuel Industries
Price $9.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like *Jet Grind Radio*, flattened and without skates. Sort of.



In this inventive puzzle platformer, we battle demonic spray paint monsters across an alternate reality version of New York City's five boroughs. The wildly shifting terrain blends familiar real-world locations with a slick fantasy vibe and an imaginative visual style that gives this quirky download a fun personality. But there's more to it than simple charm.

Since the game's young graffiti artist hero has been sucked into another dimension and is stuck on a 2D plane, leaping off the edge of a building makes him wrap around the other side. This changes the perspective (literally) in unexpected ways as he moves from one angular surface to the next. It's an ultra-cool mechanic that spices up the otherwise straightforward platforming gameplay.



There are also quite a few special moves to unlock for pummeling wacky foes, and the unique stages contain a nice balance of brawling and exploring. Running, jumping, and battling peculiar baddies blend well with the smattering of puzzles that pop up from time to time. Altogether, *Sideway's* disparate parts add up to a fresh, creative take on a classic genre.

PlayStation The Official Magazine **8**

NATHAN MEUNIER

Mercury Hg

Format **PSN** Pub/Dev **UTV Ignition Games**
Price **$4.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Mercury Hg is like *Super Monkey Ball* with an intellect. It refines tilt-table gameplay with devious level design, trippy visuals, and creative use of music that actually affects the rhythm of movement on the levels. The periodic table motif is a nice touch, but it's the puzzles that make the game: We must carefully tilt the board just enough to split our mercury blob, change and mix its colors to match certain tiles and switches, avoid pitfalls, and even jump gaps to reach the exit. The colorful, grid-based maps shift and turn in surreal ways, lending a truly distinctive feel to the game.

PlayStation **8**

JASON D'APRILE

X-Men Destiny

Format **PS3** Pub **Activision** Dev **Silicon Knights**
Price **$59.99** ESRB **Teen**

While other licensed games can blame their poor quality on bad movie tie-ins, *X-Men: Destiny* has no excuse. Letting us choose our path through an alternate Marvel timeline should be a blast, but *Destiny* falls flat due to technical issues, repetitive gameplay, and a boring six-hour campaign. It's a shame because all of the pieces of a successful *X-Men* game are present: the boss battles are epic, the combat works well, and the story is fairly engaging. Silicon Knights just forgot to give us anything fun to do with our powers, making it hard to recommend *Destiny* to even diehard fans.

PlayStation **5**

ERICK CEIL

Spider-Man Edge of Time

Format **PS3** Pub **Activision** Dev **Beenox**
Price **$59.99** ESRB **Teen**

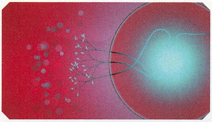
For all its bells and whistles, *Edge of Time's* core is a tired beat-'em-up that doesn't do the Wall Crawler any favors. The concept of shifting timelines while playing as two Spider-Men (current Spidey and his 2099 counterpart) seems interesting, but it's blandly linear. We tired of moving through claustrophobic hallways, completing predictable objectives, and punching personality-free goons. *Edge of Time* aims so low it can't help but manage to be a playable *Spider-Man* game, but it lacks lasting appeal.

PlayStation **5**

HENRY GILBERT

Eufloria

Format **PSN** Pub/Dev **Omni Systems Limited** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone**

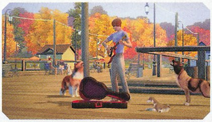


Hardcore real-time strategy fans may be put off by *Eufloria's* ambient backdrop and lack of traditional RTS trappings, but after a few rounds, it becomes apparent that it can hold its own against its more complex contemporaries. Each battle is a struggle to take control of various asteroids—the higher the stats of an asteroid, the more powerful the units it produces. The enemy A.I. rarely rolls over easily, leading to mostly exciting matches, though we occasionally experienced slow, plodding ones as well. Small frustrations and a wonky camera keep an otherwise stylish RTS-lite from being brilliant, but *Eufloria* is one of the more interesting strategy titles out there. ERICK CEIL

PlayStation 8

The Sims 3 Pets

Format **PS3** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **The Sims Studio** Price **$49.99** ESRB **Teen**

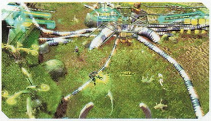


The Sims 3: Pets lets us assume the role of an omnipotent higher power to make our characters and their pets happy and healthy...or ruin their lives and set them on fire. The game's Karma system gives us neat ways to mess with our Sims' lives so long as we fulfill their desires, such as "make a friend" or "learn guitar." The new Mystery Journal offers pet-based activities including ghostbusting and treasure hunting. These activities keep the game varied so it doesn't become monotonous. We really shouldn't be spending so much time playing *The Sims*, but we just killed Adam, and Fido found something in the yard. Playing God can be addicting. ANNE LEWIS

PlayStation 8

Wanted Corp

Format **PSN** Pub **Zoo Entertainment** Dev **Eko System** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Teen**



Zoo Entertainment's co-op effort tries to put a new spin on the bloated third-person shooter genre with its "catch instead of kill" mentality. Playing as a macho gunner or a girly psychic on a criminal-infested planet, we must rack up big cash bounties by immobilizing and warping bad guys to an off-world jail. The game has its fun moments, but repetitive combat, lackluster levels, and sub-par voice acting ensure that *Wanted Corp* starts off hot but cools down too fast for its own good. The big guns, bright visuals, and plenty of upgrades all feel right, but solo play is dull. Grab a friend for best results. BRYN WILLIAMS

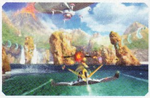
PlayStation 6

DLC Roundup

Dead Nation
Road of Devastation

Price **$3.99** ESRB **Mature**

Ready for another round of zombie horde slaughtering? Branching paths with unique rewards require careful planning in this grisly expansion. Several new weapons increase the killing goodness, and environmental obstacles can be used against our gruesome undead foes.



Skydrift
Gladiator Multiplayer Pack

Price **$4.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

The skies are filled with more danger thanks to the addition of classic deathmatch and team deathmatch modes in *Skydrift's* gun-blazing expansion. Cranking up the bloodlust, the Gladiator pack also throws down the gauntlet with six new arenas to dogfight through.

Download of the Month

Fallout New Vegas Lonesome Road

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Mature**

Putting together a few more puzzle pieces of *New Vegas'* kickoff story and the elusive "Courier Six," Lonesome Road sends us deep into a dusty canyon dubbed "The Divide" filled with marksmen, tunnelers, and more dangerous foes. The quest to learn more about the protagonist's troubled past isn't entirely a solo affair—a charismatic robot companion lends a helping hand and rounds out this DLC.

Green Lantern
Extended Cut
Not so Green

Info

Blu-ray 3D
BLU-RAY 3D • BLU-RAY • DVD • DIGITAL COPY
GREEN LANTERN
3D

Price $44.95
Creators Martin Campbell, Greg Berlanti, Michael Green, Marc Guggenheim
Starring Ryan Reynolds, Blake Lively, Peter Sarsgaard, Mark Strong
Rated PG-13/ Not Rated
Extras Deleted scenes, Justice League #1 digital issue, Maximum Movie mode, documentaries.

Beleaguered and maligned, Warner Bros.'s *Green Lantern* was easily the biggest loser in 2011's summer of Marvel. The cinematic debut of the classic DC hero was met with a level of scorn not seen since *Catwoman*. Critics and comic store cynics aside, this was far from the worst flick of the season for those in search of a fun action movie.

Green Lantern has moments of greatness overshadowed by either a lack of understanding of the subject matter, a lack of respect for the key audience, or simply an outright fear of taking the movie to the heights of science fiction for which it's uniquely keyed. When the movie flies out of Earth's atmosphere, it soars. Sure, it might be a glorified CG cartoon, but no other mainstream superhero comic has such a lock on aliens, space travel, and otherworldly attitude as the Lantern Corp.

It's just a shame the film is so doggedly grounded with the bulk of its action and drama safely set planet-side. Still, the action sequences are fun, the soundtrack is terrific, and the Blu-ray picture is pristine. Where the movie ultimately screws up so badly is the script's need to slap viewers over the head with the emotional struggles of its characters. Even a 12-year-old kid can clearly see Hal Jordan—played with vigor by Ryan Reynolds—has severe daddy issues, yet the movie never hesitates to grind to a halt to remind everyone anyway. In fact, nearly everyone in the movie has therapy-worthy paternal issues, to the point of unintentional comedy.

Just as bad is the overall message that being smart (or, as the movie calls it, a "thinker") is ultimately how villains and freaks are made. There's a bizarre nerd-vs.-jock mentality that permeates the film. Perhaps it's because Jordan isn't meant to be smart, just headstrong and brave.

The extended footage is mostly the full sequence of a young Hal watching his dad blow up, which just seems redundant given the flashback sequence a few minutes later. Beyond that, there's the picture-in-picture Maximum Movie mode (hosted by *GL* comic writer, Geoff Johns), in addition to a variety of DC-comic background material. *Green Lantern* isn't a terrible movie, even if it falls short of the character's potential. It's fun, but dumb.

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JASON D'APRILE

Going Postal

A welcome trip to Discworld

TERRY PRATCHETT'S
GOING
POSTAL

Info
Price $39.99
Creators Terry Pratchett, Jon Jones, RichardKurti,
Starring Richard Coyle, Claire Foy, Charles Dance
Rated Not Rated
Extras Commentary, bloopers.

Over the pond there have been three BBC adaptations of author Terry Pratchett's superb *Discworld* novels, but they certainly don't get much attention in the U.S. That's a true shame, as these are terrific productions. The latest is *Going Postal*, and it's a treat for fans of the author and the fantasy genre.

The story centers on con artist Moist von Lipwig, who has been given the choice of death or revitalizing the long-dead postal service in the fantastical city of Ankh-Morpork. Left to rot away, the ancient post office is full of undelivered mail as well as two oddball workers. Words have power in Discworld, and Lipwig finds his monumental task even harder with the spirits of all those undelivered letters haunting him. Add to that the nefarious patch-eyed owner of the "clacks" system—the only (barely-functioning) source of long-range communication in the land—in addition to a host of bizarre caricatures of popular fiction, and all the pieces are in place for a very respectable trip to the Disc.

If all this sounds ridiculous, well, it's supposed to be. Pratchett has long since proven himself not merely one of greatest fantasy writers of our time, but one of the greatest modern satirists and commentators on current affairs as well. In England, his fans are legion and part of the reason this adaptation works so well is because it's clear everyone involved cared about the source material. Even with a smaller budget, *Going Postal* has excellent production values and there's not a bad actor in the lot.

The interplay between the characters is great and the script does a fine job of condensing the book into a mere three hours. The movie opens with an introduction from Pratchett himself—which is bittersweet considering his failing health. A nice collection of extras including commentary, deleted scenes, bloopers, and interviews round out the BD. JD

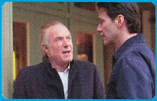
PlayStation The Official Magazine 8

Blu-ray Roundup

The Last Circus

Price $29.98 **Rated** R

This amazing (yet bizarre) Spanish movie is awe-inspiring. Gorgeously filmed, the story of the battle between a sad clown and a happy one for a trapeze girl's love mixes in layers of insanity, horror, tragedy, and black humor. It's completely worth seeing. 9



Henry's Crime

Price $29.99 **Rated** PG

This odd, dramatic, and quirky comedy is about a depressed man who intentionally goes to prison for a crime he didn't commit. A bank heist with romance and theater-like production, the movie is bit slow but very engaging. It reminds us that in the right role, Keanu Reeves can actually act. 7

The Stool Pigeon

Price $29.98 **Rated** Not Rated

This is a superb cop procedural from Hong Kong, with plenty of grit, well-written characters, and a surprising lack of the genre's weird humor and slapstick. The story of a cop and his informant is layered, intelligent, and doesn't insult the audience with overt exposition. 8

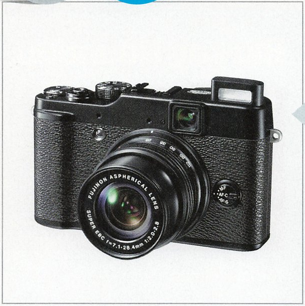
The Crow

Price $19.99 **Rated** R

Released in 1994, *The Crow* was mostly renowned for the tragic death of its star, Brandon Lee, rather than being a good movie. Director Alex Proyas' first major film is style over substance, but it's dark, Goth-heavy look helped define the style for many comic book movies to come. 7

Want that

Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people



Fujifilm X10

Rotate the X10's 28-112mm manual zoom lens to turn it on. It shoots 1080p video, sports an optical viewfinder, and its EXR mode can capture higher quality images in low light conditions.

$600

fujifilm.com

Burton Mix Master Glove

Want fumble-free music control on the slopes? These gloves feature built-in remote controls and come with a dongle that allows wireless connection to any pocket-residing iOS device.

$160

burton.com

Optoma HD8300 1080p 3D projector

This high-end home theater projector pumps out full 1080p 3D images while PureMotion4D processing makes sure the moving pictures are judder-free.

$4,500

optomausa.com

olloclip iPhone lenses

The iPhone has become the most popular camera in the world, but it's not the most versatile shooter. Enter the olloclip: slip it onto the iPhone for wide-angle, fisheye, and macro shots.

$70

olloclip.com

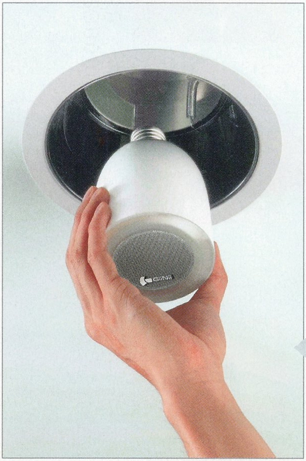
OLLOCLIP FISHEYE

PlayStation Wireless Headset

If a cooler set of cans exists, we haven't seen 'em. They're equipped with a built-in mic, 7.1 virtual surround sound, and display onscreen status reports when used with PS3.

$100

playstation.com



GiiNii AudioBulb

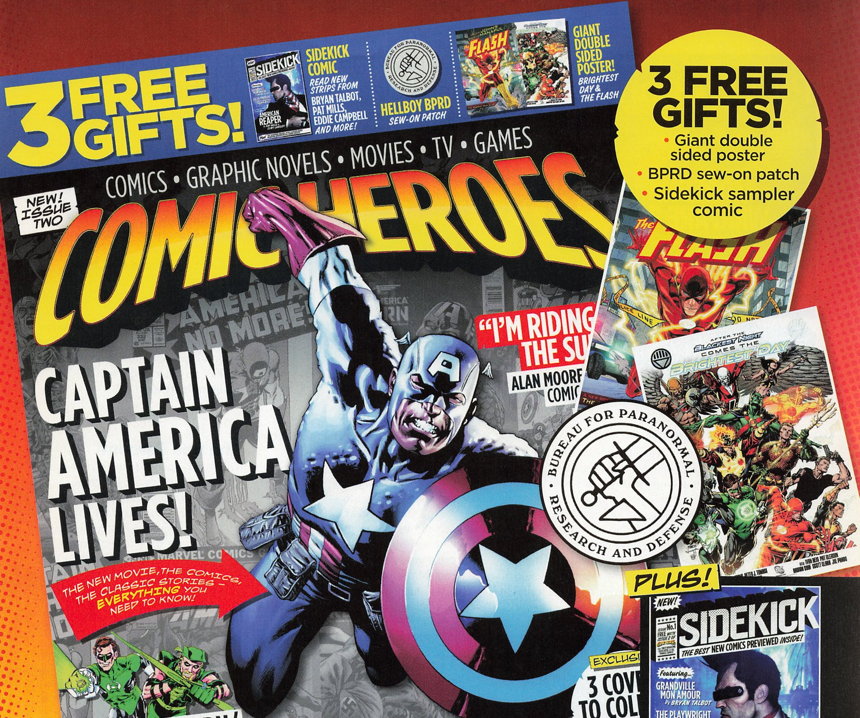
Like low profile electronics? These hybrid lightbulb/speakers can be screwed into practically any socket for both light and sound. A dock and remote can control up to eight total AudioBulbs.

$300

giinii.com

COMIC HEROES

THE MAGAZINE ALL COMICS FANS HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR...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"I'M RIDING THE SU
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3 COV
TO COL
Which one hav
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AMERICAN REAPER By PAT MILLS & CLINT LANGLEY
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A shout out to indie gaming, a torrent of Vita questions, and at least one Tea Partier

Email us at PTOM_letters@futureus.com or write to PTOM, c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Ct. Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

PS3
PSP
PSVITA
PlayStation
Official Magazine
EARLY INTEL MW3 MAPS and TIPS
SAINTS ROW: THE THIRD
10 PS3 GAMES
DOMINATE ON DAY ONE
MODERN WARFARE 3
New strategies, new tactics, new info straight from the Call of Duty team
Resistance 3
Dead Island
Madden NFL 12
RIDGE RACER BORDERLANDS
LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW

We were going to run an image of a bald eagle eating apple pie but decided this was subtler.

Fryrim

I am writing for advice, and since you people seem to be the most learned of all magazine writers, you seemed like the logical choice. I am eagerly awaiting the *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* release. The sad part is, as a teenager, I have work, and odds are I will be working on the day of the release. Now, my manager is also a huge fan of *Skyrim*, and he's trying to set it up so we can play during our shifts by hooking the game up to the monitors that store the orders. Do you think that this takes an obsession too far when you start to merge something as awesome as *Skyrim* with something as soul crushing as actual real-life activities? Also, is it not a good idea to play with my manager? This is the man who signs my checks, and beating him could end up with me cleaning out the grease traps for the next month.

MATTHEW BOHACIK ST. LOUIS, MO

This isn't a good idea, Matt. It's the BEST idea.

$2,745

Or Do We...

I write you guys a lot, and you've never published one of my letters. I was wondering: when you see one of my emails, do you just ignore it?

JACOB THE INTERNET

Yes.

The One Percent

This is in response to the middle class citizen named Edward (commoner name) whose letter stated that the items featured in your Want That section are too expensive. Hey peasant, get a real job with a six-figure salary, liberal. ALL HAIL GLEN BECK!

DAMIAN THE INTERNET

You're not related to the Koch brothers, are you?

Cross Media Bleh

Ok, I think it's about time that PSN has a major update like the Xbox 360 did (boo). The update basically changed the Xbox all around, and who doesn't want that for PS3 (a crazy man)? I'd love to see a totally new layout for player profiles and the XMB. Also, more integration with Trophies (ding). I think if they introduced such a thing at the next E3, it would blow all the other panels away.

A.J. GILBERT ROCHESTER, NY

In Defense of Indie

I saw the preview of *The Witness* in issue 50 (October) and I wanted to thank you guys for giving this game some attention. With Sony's new 10 year plan for being more open to emotion, art, and indie developers, more and more games that are trying to do interesting things should end up on PSN. If you guys treat these games as important and meaningful and give them their deserved attention, developers will notice that there is a caring audience in us, the Sony family. **JUST** THE INTERNET

Admittedly, we generally tend to focus on bigger, flashier games, but at the same time, we'll always have a soft spot for the little guy (especially when he makes amazing games like Braid*). Next to the Vita, the future of PSN has us more excited than anything!*

We welcome reader photos, letters, and stories ("Submissions"), however, we cannot promise to publish any Submission and none will be returned. Neither PlayStation: The Official Magazine ("PTOM") nor Future US, Inc. shall be liable for loss or damage to any Submission. By sending in your Submissions to PTOM you represent and warrant that you own or otherwise have all necessary rights to the Submissions to allow us to publish them in PTOM and as follows. You grant PTOM a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive right and fully sub-licensable license to use, copy, distribute, publish, modify, adapt, translate, and store, your Submissions, in any form, format, or medium, of any kind now known or later developed and to use your name, likeness, and any other information in connection with the use of the Submission you provide.

SONY
PS Store
Little Deviants
Uncharted
Browser
Friends
Hot Shots Golf NEXT
Near
Photos
Trophies
Messages
PlayStation

We're totally with you on this, A.J. A mid-console life update could be what the system needs to recapture everyone's attention (and solve a few navigation problems in the process). Have you seen PS Vita's home screen? Lots of bubbles instead of the XMB's row of icons. It's possible we could see a similar dashboard implemented on PS3 at some point.

Digital Downfall

Why haven't more gamers expressed their concern over the trend toward digital downloads? PC games have already taken the plunge into the digital market, as has the PSPgo. I can't possibly see any benefit for the gamers on this one. Game companies will save money by not having to produce cases, instruction manuals, and discs. The proper thing to do would be to slash the price of digital downloads. Everyone knows that's not going to happen. The biggest concern I have is the negative effects this will have on the world's economy. There will no longer be a need for videogame stores like GameStop. Don't forget about the factories that produce and distribute the games—they'll be shut down as well. That's thousands of retailers and factories out of business because game developers are getting greedy. As a gamer I'd like to take a stand against this trend (although it's a lost cause). Go out and buy your games from your local stores. Do the right thing and keep your neighbors' and friends' jobs secure.

DUSTIN COKER TOPEKA, KS

Woah, slow down, Dustin. First of all, GameStop's not going anywhere any time soon. Yes, more and more publishers are offering digital purchasing options, but that doesn't necessarily mean the death of all physical media is right around the corner (er...probably). Just look at PS Vita: Yes, it allows gamers to purchase games digitally, but it still offers a special memory card slot for traditional boxed games. And even if physical media does disappear, it's very likely stores like GameStop will find ways to adapt. As for the price of digital downloads, well, let's just hope your wager is wrong.

Need the Info, People

In your review section, each write-up includes a pink Info box that includes, among other things, an "It's like" description. For me, it would be extremely helpful if this were replaced with a "Genre" category. Oftentimes, after reading a short write-up of a game, I'm forced to head over to IGN to see what the game even is. After finding out what type of game it is, your review scores tend to make a lot more sense and carry more meaning. If I knew going in that, say, I was reading about an FPS that scored a "6" that would instantly tell me not to buy the game, as the market is flooded with that genre. But a JRPG with a score of "6" might still warrant a test drive since they are so few and far between.

JOHN BICHERL THE INTERNET

We agree that genre is a pretty critical piece of information to share in a review. That's why we always try to include it somewhere in the text of the article itself. We apologize if some of our micro-reviews were unclear, but by and large, putting the genre in the Info box would just be redundant.

Play Time's Over

My friend now owns an Xperia Play. He finally got me to want it, but I also want a PS Vita. The problem is that Vita has some of the features as the Play. I wouldn't like to have to carry both a Play and the Vita, so do you guys think Sony can smack both together to make an awesome sandwich?

ALEX BUCHANAN HALIFAX, CANADA

PS Vita is many things, Alex, but it's not—and probably never will be—a phone. If you can really only choose one, we'd say hold out for a Vita.

Ask Roger

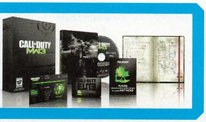
Q Why did you decide to replace the PlayStation 2 logo on the cover with the PlayStation Vita logo? Why not get rid of the PSP logo?

COLE JOHANSON
BOTHELL, WA

A Oh, Cole, have you not learned that to everything there is a season? A time to plant, a time to reap; A time to laugh, a time to weep? And as much as we love PlayStation 2, there also comes a time for us to let go and move on. Besides, no one sends us PS2 games to cover anymore. At least PSP has become the de facto system for JRPGs, but sadly its time too, will someday pass.

Price Warfare

In Issue 51, we reported the price of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*'s Hardened edition as $80. The final MSRP for the package is actually $99.99



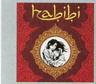
Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

Coca-Cola Freestyle

"These are tough times for the good ol' U. S. of A. People question whether its capacity for greatness and innovation has passed... But behold: Coca-Cola Freestyle dispenses 100+ soda flavors from a single machine! We're back, baby."

ROGER BURCHILL



Habibi

"It's easy to see why Craig Thompson's Habibi took seven years to create: lush hand-drawn illustrations spill over page after gorgeous page, bringing to life an ambitious yet relatable epic. This is destined to be a classic."

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Big Mouth Toys The Gun Mug

"There are two things I value more than anything else on the planet: coffee and justice. The gun mug lets me have both. Trust me—no one asks you to file TPS reports when you're sippin' out of this bad boy."

RYAN TALJONICK

modern family

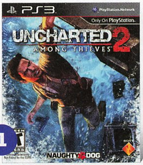
Modern Family

"Charming characters, relatable dilemmas, and just the right amount of laughs and 'aw's has me hooked on Modern Family."

ANNE LEWIS

PS3
Essential collection

Build the ultimate PS3 library with our no-filler guide to the best next-gen games



1

Action Adventure

Uncharted 2
Among Thieves

There's no way around it, Nathan Drake is the PS3's biggest star and *Uncharted 2* is his most impressive adventure yet, with breathtaking action and an incredible story. No excuses: Get it and play it!

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Naughty Dog**

GOD OF WAR III

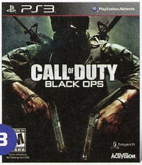
2

Action Adventure

God of War III

Huge beautiful battlegrounds and brutally gory fights with magnificent climaxes: we expected the world from the finale of Kratos' trilogy and we got it. A must-have for anyone with even the slightest amount of bloodlust.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Santa Monica Studio**



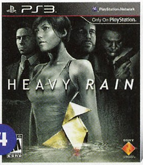
3

First-Person Shooter

Call of Duty
Black Ops

Black Ops improves on *Modern Warfare's* already awesome FPS formula. The franchise is in top form with a brand new single-player story, the beloved zombie mode, and its top-notch online multiplayer.

10 Pub **Activision**
Dev **Treyarch**



4

Adventure

Heavy Rain

Innovative, intriguing, and immersive, *Heavy Rain* is one of the most original titles in years. The mystery of the Origami Killer will keep you guessing until it's solved... or until the heroes die in the process.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Quantic Dream**

ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS
RED DEAD REDEMPTION

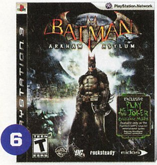
5

Open-World Shooter

Red Dead Redemption

Continuing with its record of amazing titles, Rockstar's latest open-world game combines a drop-dead gorgeous Old West with a mesmerizing story and fabulous characters.

10 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar SD/North**



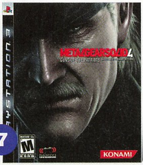
6

Action Adventure

Batman
Arkham Asylum

Finally, the Caped Crusader gets the current-gen game he deserves. Use a plethora of bat-gadgets and bat-moves to take back the Joker-controlled Arkham Asylum and love every second of it.

10 Pub **Eidos/Warner Bros.**
Dev **Rocksteady**



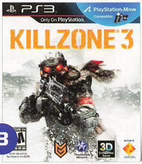
7

Stealth Action

Metal Gear Solid 4

Hideo Kojima's masterpiece might be criticized for its lengthy cutscenes and convoluted storyline, but that shouldn't stop anyone from experiencing one of the most important games on any platform today.

10 Pub **Konami**
Dev **Kojima Productions**



8

First-Person Shooter

Killzone 3

War isn't pretty—unless you're playing *Killzone 3*. But the latest clash between the ISA and Helghast ventures beyond great graphics with improvements to combat, storyline, and multiplayer that propel it to the FPS genre's top ranks.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Guerrilla Games**

SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV
CAPCOM

9

Fighter

Super Street Fighter IV

An update to the best fighting game from the most well-respected series in gaming history makes for a can't-miss title. Kicking heads and nostalgia combine to form one perfect package.

10 Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom**

ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS
L.A. NOIRE

10

Adventure

L.A. Noire

Rockstar blazes new gameplay trails again with its MotionScan technology that captures and animates facial expressions. Players must "read" people while investigating crimes in a vividly recreated 1940s Los Angeles.

9 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Team Bondi**

Team Choice

Dark Souls

"It's a rare ocassion when we celebrate the existence of a game that made us tear our hair out. *Dark Souls* may be the toughest action RPG around, but it's almost always fair in its punishment. No other recent title has given us such an adrenaline rush. Try it if you dare."

Ryan Taljonick
Assistant Editor

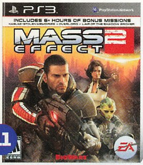
Power
Custom silicon harnesses crisp HD, ear-splitting audio, multi-processor might, and Blu-ray to deliver pure gaming perfection.

Online
Surf the net, message friends, and download movies, music and expansion packs, plus demos and games from the PlayStation Store.

Connectivity
USB slots to plug in DualShock pads and many other devices.

Want More?
Get inside access to hot games, sizzling betas, and other goodies by subscribing to Qore. Well? What are you waiting for?
Get it now on PSN

Presented by the PlayStation Network



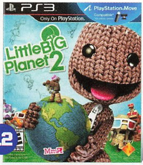
11

Role-Playing Shooter

Mass Effect 2

Mass Effect 2 features a spectacular story wrought with intense action and game-changing decisions, and the PS3 version of BioWare's third-person shooter/RPG is the franchise's best. Bring on *Mass Effect 3*!

10 Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **BioWare**



12

Platformer

LittleBigPlanet 2

Oh Sackboy, how we love thee. The biggest little game on PS3 is rocking our worlds with its sequel. The standard in-game fare is excellent, but it's the ingenious levels crafted by the the fan community that truly amaze and delight.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Media Molecule**

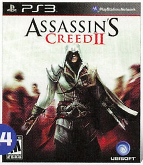
13

Role-Playing

Final Fantasy XIII

It takes a bit of a commitment and the gameplay is more linear in this outing, but the gorgeous visuals, crazy deep combat, and oh yes, the lovely heroine Lightning, make this RPG more than worth getting into, and through.

10 Pub **Square Enix**
Dev **Square Enix**



14

Stealth Adventure

Assassin's Creed II

While the first *Assassin's Creed* may not quite have lived up to its full potential, Ubisoft built off what they learned to create the best parkour-influenced stealth game of all time. It doesn't hurt that it's awfully pretty in action either.

10 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Ubisoft Montreal**

15

First-Person Puzzler

Portal 2

Valve's insidiously creative puzzle adventure twists our perception of reality and tosses it through gateways we shoot into its walls. If your brain starts hurting, invite a friend—co-op adds a "hole" other dimension to gameplay.

9 Pub **Valve / EA**
Dev **Valve**

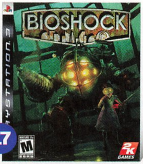
16

Driving

Need For Speed Hot Pursuit

The high-speed pursuits from the good old days are back and they look better than ever. Race the cops or join them, but the cars are hot either way so don't let that sway which side of the law to select.

10 Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Criterion Games**



17

First-Person Shooter

BioShock

One of the most beautifully designed shooters of all time with an amazing story to boot. Due to the freshness and originality of the first romp through Rapture, we recommend the original over the still magnificent sequel.

10 Pub **2K Games**
Dev **Irrational Games**

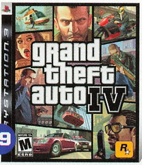
18

Sport

NBA 2K12

Basketball has always trailed behind other sports in its videogame translation. Not anymore. 2K Sports' franchise has reached true baller status with its gorgeous, feature-rich hoops experience—even down to the players' tattoos.

10 Pub **2K Sports**
Dev **Visual Concepts**



19

Open-World Action

Grand Theft Auto IV

There's a reason why *GTA* sells like crazy. This open-world gangster game is one of the most incredible achievements that the videogame medium has to offer. Great story, great characters, great adventure. Just plain great.

10 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar North**

20

Sport

MLB 11 The Show

Consider the sport of baseball a PlayStation exclusive as there's no better videogame representation of the American pastime. The Move-supported Home Run Derby adds arcade fun on top of the simulation perfection.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **SCE San Diego**

PSN Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without.

BEST FULL GAMES

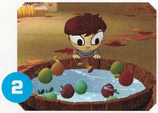
1

Creepy Crawly Platformer

Limbo

Limbo may have taken its time coming to PSN, but it was worth the wait. The game melds simple controls with supremely challenging gameplay and a beautiful, but chilling, aesthetic. It's the rare game where we die often but never feel frustrated about it.

10 Pub **Playdead**
Dev **Playdead**

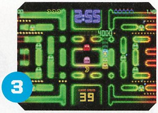

2

Tricks and Treats

Costume Quest

Sure, it's Halloween themed, but the adventure itself is timeless. With candy and monster-smiting in equal measure, this sugary delight is a charming homage to *Final Fantasy X-2*, enhanced by Tim Schafer's humor.

9 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

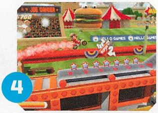

3

Retro Revival

Pac-Man Championship Ed.

There'll always be a place in our hearts for gaming's gluttonous yellow goober—but nostalgia be damned, this retro homage offers a whole new frenetic take on the classic gameplay.

9 Pub **Namco Bandai**
Dev **Namco Bandai**


4

Platforming Puzzle Racer

Joe Danger

A mix of *ExciteBike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous has never been this awesome.

9 Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**

5

Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game makes blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest triple-A offerings. Don't pass this one up.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

6

Puzzle Shooter

PixelJunk Shooter

Featuring alien and rock blasting galore, ihe fourth entry in the *PixelJunk* series is easily the best. Saving trapped mining colonists with a versatile, environmental puzzle-solving ship is a creative and challenging affair that taxes both our mind and our reflexes.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**

7

Lettuce Defend Ourselves

Plants vs. Zombies

This ubiquitous tower defense game has made the platform rounds, but there's no denying its insidious charms and eternal goofiness. Hours will be spent meticulously maintaining the grid-like lawn in an attempt to fend off the rampaging waves of groaning, brain-chomping zombies.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **PopCap Games**

8

Role-playing Puzzler

Might & Magic Clash of Heroes

Don't overlook *Heroes* with its throwback 2D visuals and turn-based battle system—the RPG-flavored puzzle action requires stacking creatures for attacks and building walls for defense. It may look and play old school, but it's still mighty fun and magically challenging.

9 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Capybara Games**

9

Hardcore brawler

Street Fighter III Third Strike Online

This perfect port of the legendary 1997 arcade game features all new netcode that virtually eliminates lag. *Third Strike's* deep, demanding mechanics have earned it a diehard following. It deserves to be rediscovered and celebrated.

9 Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom/Iron Galaxy**

10

Dolled-Up Adventure

Stacking

Double Fine games come chock full of personality and charm. Using babushka dolls to solve puzzles and explore a '30s Depression-era–esque world of miniature mannequins may not seem all that compelling, but it is. This is a fine argument for Double Fine to make more PSN titles.

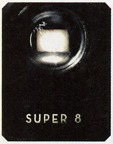
8 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month

"I know that's your camera, sir, but technically, that's my film."

© 2011 Paramount Pictures. All rights reserved.



Super 8

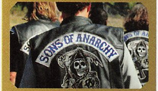
ETA **Nov 22** Rated **PG-13** Genre **Sci-fi, Thriller** Studio **Paramount Pictures**

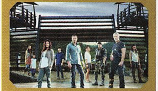
Ah, yes. Nothing quite captures the spirit of youth like a group of scrappy youngsters creating homemade movies with Super 8 film. That is, until a train derails in the middle of their set, creating widespread destruction and causing a series of strange events to unfold in their small town. That's when things start to get...interesting. J.J. Abrams' *Super 8* is full of sci-fi mystery, and is a perfect accompaniment to a night at home with our PS3.

Top VDS Downloads

Movies

- *Fast Five (Extended Edition)*
- *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*
- *Scream 4*
- *Horrible Bosses*
- *Bridesmaids (Unrated)*





TV Shows

- *Sons of Anarchy*
- *Terra Nova*
- *Breaking Bad*
- *South Park*
- *The Walking Dead*

BEST FREE STUFF

1

Peerless Puzzler

Portal 2 Peer Review DLC

Loaded with awesome content, this free DLC retools familiar *Portal* puzzle elements in all-new ways with a fresh co-op multiplayer campaign and separate challenge missions for solo or co-op play.

Pub **Valve**
Dev **Valve**

2

Can you dig it?

Rochard wallpapers

With four fun wallpaper designs to pick from, we'd be considered anti-union if we didn't adorn our PS3 as homage to this plump but personable space miner's subterranean puzzle adventures.

Pub **SOE**
Dev **Recoil Games**

3

We got the beat

Patapon 3 Mission Pack 1

Great, yet another round of "Pon-Pon-Pata-Pon" is stuck in our heads on infinite repeat. This free pack is loaded with new stages to tackle and treasure to nab while waging adorable rhythm warfare.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Pyramid/Japan Studio**

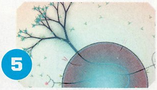
4

Animal Fragmetism

Cabela's Big Game Hunter 2012 DLC

This trio of downloadable levels—Texas Woods, Chile Plateau, and Alaskan Rocks—is brimming with big game critters to pump full of virtual lead. Now get out there and make Ted Nugent proud.

Pub **Activision**
Dev **Cauldron**



5

Natural High

Eufloria wallpaper

Bask in the soft glow of warm planetary landscapes populated by lush trees reaching towards the cosmos. We might need to take a nap after staring at this soothing wallpaper. That's not a bad thing.

Pub **Omni Systems Limited**
Dev **Omni Systems Limited**

IN THE MOOD FOR...

Winning

THREE WINNERS!
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Like us on Facebook for a chance to win one of three Mad Catz prize bundles!

To reach PTOM's Facebook page, head to www.facebook.com/PTOMus or simply scan the convenient QR code below.

Each Mad Catz prize bundle contains:

Street Fighter X Tekken Arcade FightStick Pro (1)
Arcade FightStick Carrier (1)
Tritton AX Pro 5.1 Dolby Digital Headset (1)
PS3 FPS Pro GamePad (1)
Total ARV: $420

Street Fighter X Tekken Arcade FightStick Pro

PS3 FPS Pro GamePad

Tritton AX Pro 5.1 Dolby Digital Headset

Arcade FightStick Carrier

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PlayStation: The Official Magazine Statement of Ownership Post Office Notice: Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation for Periodicals class privileges as required by 39 USC3685: 1. Title of Publication: PlayStation: The Official Magazine. 2. Publication No. 1941-5303. 3. Date of Filing: 09/30/11. 4. Issue Frequency: Monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue. 5. Number of issues published annually: 13. 6. Annual subscription price: $24.95. 7. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. 8/9. Complete address of the headquarters of general business offices of the publisher, editor, and managing editor: Publisher: Kristen Salvatore - 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080; Managing Editor: Roger Burchill - same address. 10. Owner: Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Shareholder: Future PLC, Beauford Court, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA12BW U.K. 11/12. N/A. 13. Publication title: PlayStation: The Official Magazine. 14. Issue date for Circulation Data below: October 2011. 15. Extent and nature of circulation given in this order, number of average copies each issue during preceding 12 months followed by actual number of copies published nearest filing date: A. Total Number of Copies: 206,284; 186,972. B. Paid and/or Requested Circulation: (B1) Mail subscriptions Outside-County: 75,853; 60,930. (B2) Paid In-County Subscriptions: 0; 0. (B3) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution: 33,093; 31,500. (B4) Other Classes Mailed Through USPS: 0; 0. C. Total Paid and/or Requested: 108,946; 92,430. D. Free Distribution: (D1) Free Outside-County Copies: 2,478; 2,394. (D2) Free In-County Copies: 0; 0. (D3) Free Other Classes Mailed Through USPS: 0; 0. (D4) Free Distribution Outside the Mail: 575; 0. E. Total Free Distribution: 3,053; 2,394. F. Total Distribution: 111,999; 94,824. G. Copies Not Distributed: 94,286; 92,148. H. Total: 206,285; 186,972. I. Percent Paid and/or Requested: 97%; 97%. 16. Publication of Statement of Ownership is required and is printed in this issue of this publication: Holiday 2011. 17. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete: Stephanie Blake, Circulation Director.

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Superb Networking System!

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Characters

204
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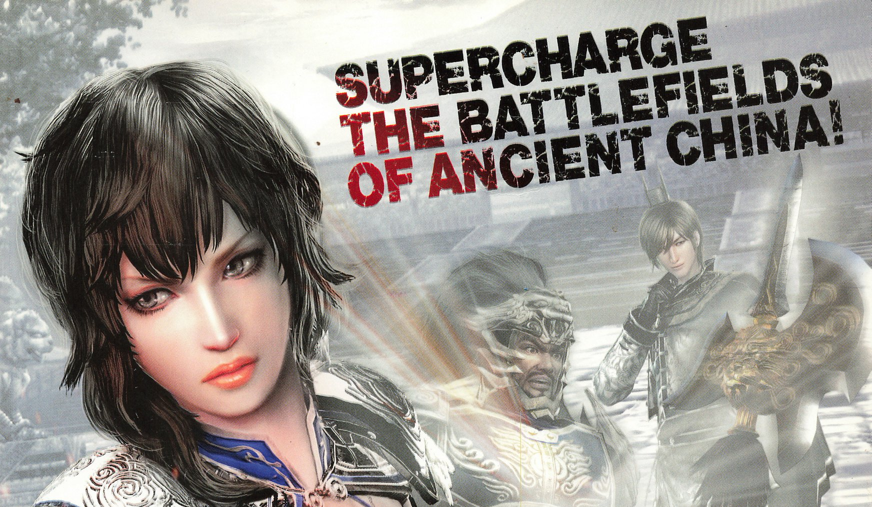

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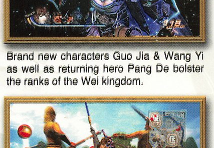

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